

Abstract

Playing with the Word: The Use of Participatory Drama Technique in the Sermon

Donald R. Murray

Participatory Drama Technique (PDT) is quite simply a sermon illustration. The author created the term to designate a type of sermon illustration adapted from drama therapy (now called “creative drama”). PDT is a means of engaging the listener in the process of discovering biblical truth during the sermon. It involves non-performance, audience-participation “play” in the sermon.

The hypothesis of this dissertation is that the use of PDT in a sermon greatly enhances the listener’s ability to retain biblical truth presented in a sermon. The objective of this thesis is to determine if indeed there is any difference in the listener’s ability to remember a sermon, its theme and/or main points, based upon the use of a PDT in a sermon.

The method involved in meeting the objective of this descriptive study was to preach six sermons and follow these sermons with six questionnaires. Two sermons were preached on a similar or related topic. One sermon used a PDT, and the other did not. After the sermons, listeners were queried by sermon questionnaires to determine if there was a difference in their ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points, based on the use of a PDT in the sermon.

The limited number of responses does not allow this study to come to statistically or quantitatively valid conclusions. However, it is concluded that the employment of a PDT

in three of the six sermons in this study, exhibited real potential as an effective way to capture the listener's attention, and to enhance the listener's ability to remember the sermon.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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PLAYING WITH THE WORD: THE USE OF

PARTICIPATORY DRAMA TECHNIQUE IN THE SERMON

presented by

Donald R. Murray, Jr.

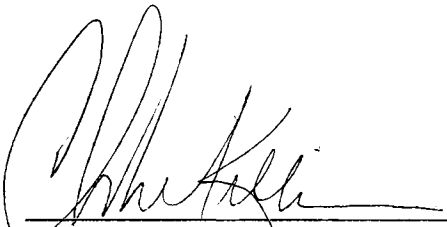
has been accepted toward fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary


Wilmore, Kentucky



Mentor

March 23, 2000

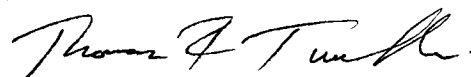
Date



Internal Reader

March 23, 2000

Date



Associate Director, Doctor of Ministry Program

March 23, 2000

Date



Dean, Doctor of Ministry Program

March 23, 2000

Date

PLAYING WITH THE WORD: THE USE OF
PARTICIPATORY DRAMA TECHNIQUE IN THE SERMON

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Donald R. Murray, Jr.

March 7, 2000

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank those who helped me complete this dissertation and the D.Min. course: Dr. Ellsworth Kalas for believing in my potential, Dr. Chuck Killian for his mentoring me through this process, Dr. Donald Demaray for his encouragement, and Dr. Dale Galloway for his motivation and counsel.

I would also like to thank the people of Gateway Friends Church, Corona, California for their patience and participation in this study.

I would like to thank my secretary, Susan Shekels for her time in helping to prepare the graphs.

And finally I would like to thank my family and my wife, Charlann for their patience, support, and prayers throughout this process.

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Study

As the twenty-first century arrives, ministering the Word of God to the community-at-large challenges today's preacher. Preaching the gospel requires that the preacher balance the needs of those listening with his/her responsibility to faithfully present the truth of God as revealed in his Word. The needs of today's audience are, in some ways, dramatically different than those of previous generations.

Haddon Robinson, in an article entitled, "Communicating the Message from the Sponsor in a Television Society," points to a major influence of the societal changes leading to this inevitable transformation of our preaching for our time,

Television has become the dominate medium in our culture . . . we have become a culture now that is dominated by hearing, by story, by image and the value system of the entertainment industry is now the value system of our culture (3).

The modern media is one primary contributor to the difference between the audiences of the last generation and the audience today's preacher faces on any given Sunday morning.

As we enter the new millennium, television, videos, movies, and computers have changed the way we live, and the way we communicate. We are no longer a primarily verbal society. The radio age has given way to the television/mass media age. We live in an image-bombarded environment. Today's MTV generation has been conditioned to process a barrage of images without feeling a need to retain or critique the information presented. From music videos to the snapshots of "NYPD Blue," people are programmed to simply watch the images without necessarily understanding or discerning, let alone

remembering, what they've just seen.

In his book, Amusing Ourselves to Death, Neil Postman writes,

The average length of a shot on network television is only 3.5 seconds, so that the eye never rests, always has something new to see. Moreover, television offers viewers a variety of subject matter, requires minimal skills to comprehend it, and is largely aimed at emotional gratification. American television, in other words, is devoted entirely to supplying its audience with entertainment (86-87).

This presents a challenge for today's preacher. He/she must find ways to engage his/her listeners without losing their attention in the first minute or two of a sermon. In addition to this, the preacher must also find a way to transform his/her audience from "couch potatoes," who simply watch without any concern other than for time-passing entertainment, into active participants in the process of discovering God's truth and applying it to one's life. The effective preacher today must find more effective ways to help the listener retain the truth proclaimed in the sermon.

Sermons should draw people into contact with the truth of God's Word so that they become active in the process of truth discovery. The capable preacher must take the abstract truth of God's Word and make it concrete and applicable to the hearer's daily life. In fact, the truly capable preacher will find ways to help the hearer make a connection with the truth and then find a way to apply it for himself/herself.

This connection is crucial to retention. In Searching for Memory, Daniel Schacter reminds us, "To establish a durable memory, incoming information must be encoded much more thoroughly, or deeply, by associating it meaningfully with knowledge that already exists in memory" (43).

For both sermon retention and application to life to occur, the preacher must find

a way to draw his/her audience into the sermon. People need a vehicle that affords them the opportunity to become participants in the sermon and not just spectators. People also need a “hook” to hang the truth on so they can retain it.

In some respects this has always been true. Hence sermon illustrations have a long and illustrious history in the art of preaching. Those who preach the Word have, following Jesus’ example, often looked for ways to bring the abstract side of a sermon or lesson into the concrete world via illustrations of one sort or another. Illustrations not only help to crystallize concepts, but they also help make truth easier to remember.

Jesus frequently employed a number of illustration techniques in his teachings. He would often use illustrations like parables, the stories of the lost sheep or the good shepherd; agricultural events, like the separating of the wheat from the chaff; even object lessons, like the fig tree or the lilies and sparrows, etc. The technique employed was designed to capture the attention and to “tag” the lesson in the listeners’ minds so that the chance of recall was enhanced.

Jesus knew he had to draw people into the lesson, and ignite their imaginations, for them to discover the truth he conveyed. He also knew that if the people didn’t identify with what his teaching that they were not likely to remember it nor apply in their own lives. Therefore he frequently illustrated his preaching and teaching.

The Purpose of Sermon Illustration

The great Gospel orator, John R. W. Stott, in his book, The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century: Between Two Worlds, says,

In order to see, we need light. And the word “illustrate” means to illumine, to throw light or lustre upon an otherwise dark object. It is for this reason that

sermon illustrations have sometimes been likened to the windows of a house (240).

Referring to the teachings of Spurgeon, Stott reminds us that the purpose for windows in a house is to allow light in. In like manner, the purpose of a sermon illustration is to “illumine” the truth, to make it more accessible to the listener. The author would add that the purpose of sermon illustrations is not only to reveal the truth, but also to make the truth retain-able. Illustrations should draw listeners into the truth in such a way that they see it, feel it, wrestle with it, understand it, and remember it.

Robinson, writing in his book, Biblical Preaching, calls this “earthing our sermons” (149). A properly applied sermon illustration should ground the truth, or better yet, provide the tools by which an individual may ground the truth. This helps them remember the truth because they have participated in the process of learning how to apply it to their daily lives.

The focus of this study is a particular type of sermon illustration. It looked at this question, “In an image-dominated culture how can a preacher best engage his/her listeners in the sermon so that a listener’s ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or its main points, over a longer period of time is enhanced?” In other words, is there a particular type of sermon illustration that works better in our day and age?

The Problem and Its Context

Preaching in our current culture presents a problem that can be an opportunity. The problem we face is that our collective audiences have changed. The way to communicate effectively with people today offers a unique challenge to those who will embrace it with creativity and imagination.

Our message (the product) will ever be the same, but the vehicle (the packaging) for sharing it must occasionally be modified for us to remain effective in affecting people's lives with the Good News. Any attempt to reach the lost and nurture the believer will be assisted by understanding and working with the changing environment in which we all live.

One grave danger every preacher faces is the tendency to slide into a routine and often mundane preaching style. When preachers become comfortable with a certain rhythm, they tend to play it over and over again. They can easily busy themselves preparing sermons, but fail to invest themselves in the effective communication of the gospel to the various generations attending their churches. Stuart Briscoe says, "Communication theorists insist that people learn by listening, discussing, watching, and discovering. It must be conceded that preaching usually allows for only one or two of these . . ." (11). Too often our preaching styles focus primarily on listening.

On occasion a preacher may provide opportunities for the congregation to discuss the sermon in small groups. An outline may even be included in the Sunday bulletin for interested parties who wish to review or dig deeper on their own. However, more often than not, the average American sermon offers only faint, unintentional moments for personal discovery and yet this is one of the most crucial aspects of effective communication.

Television and the video media have modified the way people respond to communication. Robinson says, "They are able to process a lot of information, pictures, and stimuli but the evidence is that they are no longer able to do sequential reasoning" ("Communicating" 3). Jerry Mander adds,

They [Images] only require that your eyes be open. The images enter you and are recorded in memory whether you think about them or not. They pour into you like fluid into a container . . ." (204).

From network news reports, to docu-dramas, to sit-coms, to movies, viewers need do nothing more than receive the images and accept their authenticity without any critical thought. After all, such critical thinking would express a lack of trust in the television reporters and producers. Hence TV viewers are given permission to be absent-mindedly "entertained" often under the guise of being educated and informed.

Everything on television is basically treated the same. While many of the news or news-related shows claim to be informing or educating the general public, in reality they offer little need for reflection or thought. Images are the driving force behind television no matter what the specific genre happens to be. Postman writes, "The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining . . ." (87).

When the underlying message emanating from the tube is "let me entertain you," then the resultant behavior of the audience becomes thoughtless absorption rather than attentive observation. As Steven Stark points out, "prime-time network entertainment still tends to be designed for a tired, stressed-out audience watching at home without paying close attention" (3).

And so it is that the day of the simple didactic outline sermon (three points and a poem) is rapidly fading. The need for engaging and keeping the attention of the masses, while helping them discover the truth of God's Word, is evident. Our culture has been conditioned to watch without paying attention, to listen without hearing.

Somehow, the old adage still remains true, "The more things change the more

they stay the same.” W. E. Sangster, writing in 1954, wrestled with this same issue. In his book, The Craft of the Sermon, he writes,

He [The preacher] has the awful task of making the word of God alive to men and women who have been busy all the week seeking the bread of this life and who, even in the sanctuary, find it hard to keep their minds on God and holy things. He must help them in every wholesome way he can. If he can get an arresting beginning, he may have their awed attention the whole time and be able to hide the truth of God deep in their hearts (126).

People are still people, and the effective preacher must use imagination and creativity to prick their interest. The major difference today is that the people sitting in our pews no longer come from a primarily verbal culture, they come from an essentially image-based, visual culture. And this is only a part of the pastor’s challenge in reaching his/her audience with God’s Word.

On any given Sunday the average American pastor will preach to a congregation made up of at least three or four groups of people. A quick perusal of Michael Sack’s “The Multiplex Congregation” (Figure 1.1 page 8) reveals the varying and sometimes contradictory needs of such a congregation. Each person in attendance comes to the service with different needs, learning styles and communication or listening skills. The use of a participation drama technique or “play” allows each listener to assimilate the sermon in their own unique way.

A propensity of erroneous assumptions exists about drama and the Church. A quick perusal of books and articles on this subject often leads one to two conclusions. First, that drama in the Church should remain relegated to children’s plays, cantatas, artistic monologues, etc. Second that adults no longer benefit from the spontaneous discoveries of play. This leads to a mistaken conclusion—that the employment of drama

techniques in the church is restricted to children or youth, unless of course, it is a performance of some sort. Many an adult imagination has smothered under

The Multiplex Congregation Understanding the four audiences you face (from <u>Leadership</u> , Fall 1995, p. 31)	
GENERATION X WHO THEY ARE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 to 25 years old • "Feed me" generation • Low self-esteem • Retreat from world into small groups WHAT THEY NEED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconditional acceptance • Very short list of what's really important • Written reinforcement of key concepts (e.g., a spiritual notebook) 	BOOMERS WHO THEY ARE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 to 50 years old • "Entertain me and earn me" generation • Faddish, intellectually lazy • Looking for spiritual definition WHAT THEY NEED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk @ meaning, self-definition, & worth • New church models • Media
BUSTERS WHO THEY ARE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 to 35 years old • "Why me?" generation • Don't like crowds or mingling with other generations WHAT THEY NEED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skeptical of guarantees • Relationships • To create a better world • To talk things over with peers 	OLDER ADULTS WHO THEY ARE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 and up • "Need me and show me" generation • Possess skills and money • Want to do something worthwhile WHAT THEY NEED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In preaching, positive examples of older adults • Appreciation

- Michael Sack

Figure 1.1

the guise of "maturity," resulting in mundane sermons, and phlegmatic listeners.

The author's desire is not to minimize the role of the Holy Spirit in preparing a person's heart to receive the Word of God. Rather, it is a proposition: that Holy Spirit empowerment obliges a preacher to work with the particulars of the culture, and the manner in which people are conditioned to listen and learn.

Our primary concern is with the effective communication of the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. More than that, we want to know how to motivate people to change, to grow in Christ. Therefore we want to discover which methods of

communication are the most effective for inspiring people to become doers of the Word not mere listeners. Marva Dawn, in her book Reaching Out without Dumbing Down, reminds us,

Now it seems indisputable to me that television has habituated its watchers to a low information-action ratio, that people are accustomed to “learning” good ideas (even from sermons) and then doing nothing about them (21).

Are there sermon illustration motifs, artfully employed, that can lead people of all ages to spontaneous discovery and personal application? Is there a better way to help people remember the truth we proclaim?

The author believes that a facet of drama can help a preacher bridge the gap and navigate the rapid changes of our culture. A kind of sermon illustration, drawing upon drama techniques, that pulls people into the process of truth discovery in such a way that it is retained for a long, long time.

This vehicle or sermon illustration type called Participatory Drama Technique (PDT), facilitates effective communication of the message and allows for personal discovery of truth through a personal participation approach to preaching. This one element can help to maximize our attempts to communicate biblical truths to an often hostile and/or pre-occupied audience. The employment of PDT in a sermon serves to capture the audience’s attention, ignite their imaginations, and assist them in encoding the information for later retrieval.

Participatory Drama Technique (PDT) Defined

The author created the term “Participatory Drama Technique” to designate a type of sermon illustration adapted from drama therapy, now called “creative drama.” PDT involves non-performance, audience-participation “play” in a sermon. It is a hands-on

approach of engaging people in the process of discovering biblical truth, in such a way that they are better able to remember and incorporate that truth into daily life. PDT is a type of sermon illustration that draws every listener into participation or interaction with the message.

The label or name of this type of sermon illustration is a hybrid refined out of the author's own experience with creative drama and homiletics. The author became aware of the potential of, what he is now calling, "Participatory Drama Technique" while attending a class at Regent University. The class entitled, "Drama Therapy" was taught by Dr. Darlene Graves, a member of his church in Virginia Beach. Dr. Graves realized that his sermons leaned heavily toward the left brain, they were very analytical, but they were not as creative as they could have been. More will be said about the left and right hemispheres of the brain and how they relate to information reception and retention in Chapter Two.

Dr. Graves expressed concern that while the author's sermons were effective in communicating information, they often lacked in their ability to touch the listener and engage him/her in the process of discovering God's truth.

In an attempt to help the author discover and begin to use more of his right brain functions, Dr. Graves suggested he take her course on drama therapy. With great apprehension, he agreed. Looking back now he can see what a wonderful opportunity this class afforded him to expand the creative side of his personality and preaching.

As a type of sermon illustration, the goal of the PDT is to involve every listener in the message through a participation "tool." PDT can be as simple as having everyone stand bent over at the waist during the reading of the biblical account of the woman with the issue

of blood, which the author experienced in a chapel service. Or it can be something like the distribution of sharp nails at a Good Friday service and asking folks to press the nails into the palms of their hand while listening to the sermon or reading of the text. PDT allows the participant to enter into the sermon in a physical and an emotional fashion.

This study sprouts from an increasing interest in the power of PDT to assist the listener in the self-discovery of truth and subsequently, for long term retention.

Distinguishing PDT from Other Types of Sermon Illustrations

One might ask how the PDT differs from other types of sermon illustrations. The primary difference is the extent or scope of involvement. For example, certain PDTs are similar to object lessons, but differ in that the PDT involves each member of the audience physically rather than just visually.

One of the sermons shared for this study was about the woman caught in adultery. In an object lesson format, the preacher might hold a large stone in his/her hand and talk about its cold, hard surface. However, in the PDT format, each person is given a large stone to hold throughout the sermon. This way they feel the cold, hard surface as the preacher talks about it. They are forced, by the “playing” or the physical participation in the sermon illustration, to wrestle with the similarity between harsh, condemning words and the cold, sharp edges of the stone in their hand. The only way to avoid participation is to refuse to handle the stone personally.

Using such a “tool” enhances the involvement of each person’s senses, emotions and imaginations. Suddenly they are no longer sitting on the “couch” watching the sermon. They are right in the middle of it, grappling with their feelings. Instantly they are transported from the pew into the story itself. They must deal with it, they have made

contact with its truth. How can they not remember this experience for an extended period of time?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive study is to evaluate the relationship of a PDT in the sermon to listener retention of the sermon, its theme and/or main points conveyed in that sermon. In conducting this research the following questions will be considered:

Research Question 1: Has the listener remembered the sermon, its theme and/or main points?

Research Question 2: Is there a difference between the listener's ability to remember the sermon when a PDT is used and when one is not used?

Research Question 3: Can those who claim to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points substantiate their claim?

Methodology of the Study

The author asserts that carefully and artfully employed PDTs will capture an audience's attention. However, the critical issue for this study is the consequence of that appropriation: that is, do they remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points better when a PDT is used?

To that end, a series of six sermons was shared with the same congregation—the author's church. The series consisted of three pairs of sermons. Each pair of sermons shared a similar biblical theme or truth. One of the sermons, in each pair, employed a PDT, while the other did not. The author varied the pattern in the following manner,

First Set of Sermons: a sermon without a PDT followed by a sermon with a PDT.

Second Set of Sermons: a sermon with a PDT followed by a sermon without a

PDT.

Third Set of Sermons: a sermon without a PDT followed by a sermon with a PDT.

The author included in the study a sermon presented by one of his staff, the youth pastor. That sermon, which included a PDT, was the first sermon in the second set. This provided an opportunity to see if there was consistent impact, or lack of impact, based on the use of a PDT in the sermon when more than one preacher was studied.

A questionnaire was distributed six weeks after each of the sermons to determine the effect of the sermon on listener ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or its main points. A total of six questionnaires were distributed, collected and tallied. A detailed look at the study process follows:

1. A sermon was presented with or without PDT, depending on the rotation, as mentioned earlier.
2. Six weeks later a questionnaire was distributed to determine listener ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points.
3. At a later date, no sooner than one month, a second sermon on a similar or related subject was presented. If the first sermon used a PDT, then the second sermon did not, based on the aforementioned rotation.
4. Six weeks after that sermon, another questionnaire was distributed.
5. This pattern of a sermon with and a sermon without a PDT each followed by a questionnaire was done three times during course of the study for a total of six sermons.
6. The results of the questionnaires were tallied, charted, and studied at the conclusion of the sixth and final sermon.

All the sermons were preached at Gateway Friends Church. The author planted

the church in the spring of 1997 and he continues to serve as its pastor. A sample of the questionnaires constructed by the author with the assistance of the dissertation mentor and used in this study will be shared later in this paper (Figure 3.2 page 65).

Subjects

The people of the Gateway Friends Church served as the population for this study. This congregation is a recent church plant located in Corona, California. The church began with the author and his family (six people), and two families from the sponsoring church in Yorba Linda, California (four adults and four children). The congregation of over one hundred people is equally distributed in terms of gender and occupation. They were informed, through the church newsletter and bulletin announcements, that a questionnaire would be distributed, after each of the six sermons for this study, in order to assist their pastor in his doctoral studies. The questionnaires were distributed to all adults and teens present in the services six weeks after the preaching of each the sermons.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable of this is participation in the services when the sermon series is preached. The dependent variable measured in this study is the retention of the sermon, its theme and/or main points, presented to the sermon by the subjects.

Instrumentation

The information necessary to complete this study resides in the hearts and minds of the population. The use of questionnaires, one after each sermon, assisted in determining the overall effect of the PDTs in the sermons.

Data Collection

Filling in and returning the sermon questionnaires constituted an agreement to

participate in the study by the subjects. The questionnaires were distributed to each person attending the Sunday morning service six weeks after a sermon in the series had been preached. At the close of the service, during the announcements, people were asked to answer the simple questionnaire and return it by placing it in the offering bags as they were passed after the service.

Delimitations and Generalizability of the Study

This project proposes to study an area of preaching that has received little, if any, prior research. One project comprised of six sermons (three with a PDT, three without) cannot provide a comprehensive, definitive statement about the use and effects of PDT in the sermon. That is not the purpose of this study.

The purpose of this study is not to provide a definitive statement of fact. Rather, its purpose is to generalize about this subject matter, offer a descriptive statement about its affects, and to open the door for further investigation into the use of PDT in the sermon. The author believes that any pastor can employ a PDT in a sermon and glean similar results with any congregation. The author's desire is to challenge preachers everywhere to become more creative in their preparation and presentation of the Word of God.

The author assumes certain predictability to the outcome of future uses of PDT in sermons based on past employment of PDT in sermons. The observable effects on a listener's ability to recall a sermon, its theme and/or its main points, for those who have experienced PDTs in other sermons has provided a generalized pattern for the author's assumptions

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 will consider the location and integration of the current study in the course of related literature and research. Chapter 3 will present the design of the study. Chapter 4 will report the discoveries of the study. And Chapter 5 will complete the dissertation with a summary of the discoveries and their interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

Precedents in the Literature

Preachers are trained to proclaim the Word, but commissioned to make disciples. The preaching of the Word is a means to the end—making disciples. Any preaching that fails to attain this end distracts or, even worse, subverts the mission of the Church. It becomes unproductive—ranging from boring to merely entertaining.

In our image bombarded culture the temptation to become merely entertaining, for the sake of garnering attention and/or drawing a larger crowd, is great. However, the goal of preaching must always be to bring people face to face with the gospel message of hope, the truth of God's Word, and the availability new life in Jesus Christ.

An additional challenge, stemming from our image-dominated culture, is the issue of sermon retention. It is not acceptable, given our goal in preaching, for one to merely capture the attention of one's listeners. If the truth of God's Word presented in our preaching is to affect the lives of people, they must pay attention, and they must retain the information.

Jesus' preaching was never boring or merely amusing. His style was productive and life changing. His sermons challenged people's paradigms and called for response. He was a master communicator who never forgot his goal. He engaged every effective form of interaction with people in an attempt to convey truth and transform lives. Preachers today should do no less.

Preaching Defined

Preaching must be defined beyond simply the presentation of truth or the proclamation of the Gospel. Preaching, or rather the "foolishness" of preaching is God's

ordained means of communicating His act of redemption to the world. Tizard defines preaching as “... speaking on behalf of God as though God were entreating by us ... Preaching is not the activity of man alone; it is not merely a man who is speaking. God is speaking through him” (13).

Preaching is not religious rambling or catering to the latest fad. Preaching is allowing oneself, as the preacher, to be the channel through which God, by His Spirit, brings the hearts and minds of the listeners into a personal encounter with the Living Lord. The goal of this encounter is to produce disciples, serious followers of Jesus Christ.

Changing Paradigms

Loren Mead proposes that we are coming to the close of the second paradigm of the Church. Mead, in his book, The Once and Future Church, looks at the first two paradigms of the Church. His insights reveal the conditions leading to each paradigm’s development and the subsequent format adopted in response to the surrounding environment. The first of these, he calls the Apostolic Paradigm. The early Church was viewed as the local “called out” ones who lived a lifestyle perceived as hostile and antagonistic by the surrounding world. Christians were required to engage with the world, even though the world hated what the Church stood for. The Church was to give witness to the Gospel and Christ amidst a hostile and often dangerous environment. The Church’s mission field began right outside the doors of their house meetings—places of worship.

In the fourth century, the atmosphere changed as Christianity was established as the “official religion of the Empire” under the Roman emperor, Constantine. Mead calls

this the Christendom Paradigm. The new relationship between the Church and the world outside its doors resulted in several key changes; a fading distinction developed between sacred and secular. Missions became the task of special individuals, not ordinary Christians and the mission field was somewhere “over there.” These distinctions reflected the transformation of the Church from house meetings to “parishes.” The “parish” mind-set considered the entire community to be the “Church,” and the pastor became a community chaplain. Mead reflects, “But for the Christian, it cut the nerve of personal involvement and responsibility for witness and mission” (17).

Mead indicates that the Church is now entering a post-Christendom era. Mead lays forth certain implications, resulting from this paradigm shift, which effect the church (25). The following is an adapted list of his implications.

1. We can no longer assume that everybody is a Christian. We now have to deal with the fact that in any geographic area the majority of people may have no interest in the church whatever.

2. People no longer assume that the community is a unit of the religious world, living out values derived from the Gospel.

3. We are returning to one of the features of the Apostolic Paradigm. We now assume that the front door of the church is a door into mission territory, not just a door to the outside (Mead 25).

As we approach the end of the Christendom era in America, a shift is occurring in the perception and practice of preaching as well. Somewhere in the Christendom Paradigm the focus of preaching moved. In the early Church preaching focused on producing and nurturing disciples of Jesus. During the Christendom Paradigm the

emphasis shifted to proclaiming truth for the sake of truth. This was a natural regression based on the perception that everyone in the “parish” or neighborhood was a “Christian.”

Calvin Miller, in his book Marketplace Preaching, compares the difference between the marketplace church and the indoor church, or as Mead would call them, the apostolic church and the Christendom church. The apostolic, or marketplace, church remains focused on the people outside the church who need to hear and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. It understands that its prime function is to give witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The Christendom, or indoor, church has abandoned the marketplace and has become a museum of things remembered. It believes its prime function is to maintain its heritage. Once this occurs the sermon for the indoor church becomes a showpiece for display. Miller says,

The church seems more content to die inside than preach outside. This insidious contentment has produced a view of preaching as a kind of Christian art form. The sermon is often little more than a gallery piece to be critiqued by a congregation of worship reviewers. It has lost its commission. It has become treasured, if at all, for its own inherent beauty, style, and soothing togetherness (14).

In recent decades, preaching has “devolved” even further. Today a great deal of preaching is nothing more than the pandering of psycho-based theories of self-discovery and self-help. But as Richard Neuhaus points out,

Salvation cannot be equated with self-actualization or self-expression. Being true to oneself, in Christian perspective, means to be true to the self, one is called to be. Our appeal is not that people be reconciled to themselves. Rather, “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (95).

The current trend towards presentation of truth without regard to change in the lives of the hearers has contributed to the transformation of some in our congregations acting more like “pew potatoes” than like disciples eager to learn God’s Word and apply

it in their lives. Someone likened the average American congregation to a room full of spiritually overweight people sitting with bibs on leaning back and crying, “Feed me, Preacher ... feed me.”

In reality, churches are more likely to be filled with people who, for a number of reasons, sit there, saying, “Wake me up and earn my attention, Preacher.” Effective preaching understands the audience and adapts appropriately. As noted earlier, churches in America today consist of multiplex congregations. The task of the preacher is to engage the audience’s attention and hold it enough to communicate God’s Word to them. And communicate it in such a way that it has a lasting effect on their lives.

We live in a video age where sound bites and images have replaced the expounded word. Neil Postman writes, “The emergence of the image-manager in the political arena and the concomitant decline of the speech writer attest to the fact that television demands a different kind of content from other media” (7). During the days of radio sermons that pricked the ears were acceptable means of communicating the gospel to the masses. However, with the change to a video dominated culture, it is no longer sufficient to “hear” a sermon, people need to “see” it. Robert Bellah says, “While television does not preach, it nevertheless presents a picture of reality that influences us more than an overt message could” (279). Television also has a definite affect on people’s ability to create memories.

Memory Formation

Edmund Bolles, in his book, *Remembering and Forgetting*, writes about the chain of memory or memory making,

The principles of memory are linked together like pieces of a chain:
We remember what we understand;
we understand only what we pay attention to;
we pay attention to what we want.
This chain gives us memory (23).

Paying attention is an individual choice. Sometimes we consciously choose to pay attention to someone speaking to us. Sometimes we consciously choose not to. As our culture is influenced, more and more, by television and image-laden media, one must wonder if there is a progression towards a more subconscious or unconscious choice to not pay attention.

However, this pattern of inattention may have more to do with the how our brains are conditioned to operate when receiving information than with a conscious or subconscious choice. As we saw in Chapter One, when watching television, the viewer need not pay attention. He/she need only keep his/her eyes open so that the images can pour in.

Learning and memory require participation on the part of the individual. When we train children to memorize the alphabet or their math tables, we don't expose them to just images. We involve them in verbal recitation of the information their eyes are seeing. Hence we teach them to sing the alphabet and we have them say the math equations they see on the flash cards. Why? Because verbal communication is more effective for forming long term memories than visual or image communication. And the combination of the two increases the likelihood of long term memory formation.

This is logical because we know that a person cannot repeat a series of letters, words or math equations without a certain level of attentiveness. Once a child is involved with the information, learning occurs. This is true in people of all ages. As Mander

writes,

Knowledge results from personal experience and direct observation—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling ... All of these—the five senses plus instinct, intuition, feeling and thought—combine to produce conscious awareness, the ability to perceive ... (79).

Perception is the first step to memory making. Lisa Yount provides an excellent and simple diagram of the memory process (Figure 2.1).

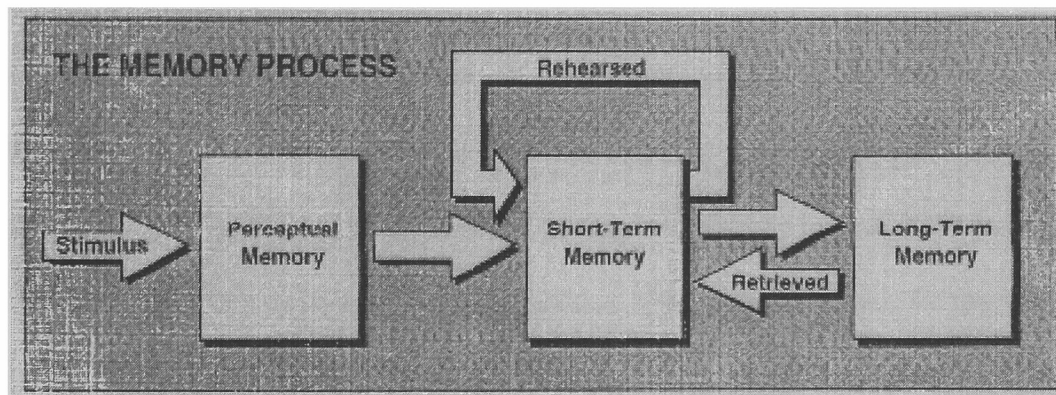


Figure 2.1

Perceptual memory is the briefest kind of memory. “Most sense data goes no further than perceptual memory” (14). The second level of memory she calls “working memory.” This is the level where all input, currently holding an individual’s attention, is stored. Rebecca Rupp writes,

To remember something in the first place, we have to pay attention to it. Most of us ordinarily ignore much of what takes place around us. We do this through a mechanism called perceptual filtering, which allows us to block out immense amounts of irrelevant input in order to focus on a limited number of important features (181).

For information to become a part of our long-term memory, we must consider it important, such as “useful facts or skills, unusual occurrences or events that cause strong feelings” (Yount 15). Once introduced into long-term memory, information or input can be available for recall from a few minutes to a lifetime. Schacter would add,

Everyday experience suggests that something that is meaningful will be more easily remembered than something that is not . . . If we want to improve our chances of remembering an incident or learning as fact, we need to make sure that we carry out elaborative encoding by reflecting on the information and relating it to other things we already know ... What we already know shapes what we select and encode; things that are meaningful to us spontaneously elicit the kind of elaborations that promote later recall. Our memory systems are built so that we are likely to remember what is most important to us (45-46).

Encoding is a term used by psychologist to refer to the process by which an individual sees, hears, thinks, feels—that is experiences—something that gets transformed into a memory. “Encoding can be thought of as a special way of paying attention to ongoing events that has a major impact on subsequent memory for them” (Schacter 42).

In order for a truth, contained in a sermon, to become a memory for the individual listener, the sermon illustration must involve the listener, via his/her senses, so that the process of encoding can occur. Simply stated, the sermon illustration should connect the biblical truth with some previous experience or knowledge within the listener so that it is sufficiently coded, stored and made recallable.

Because PDTs involve the listener’s senses and create an experiential involvement with the biblical truth, PDTs present the preacher with an effective way of giving the listener a viable means to creating a memory around that truth.

Edmund Bolles writes,

Memory copes this way: Our emotions (desires mainly) lead to attention; after paying attention and gaining experience with something, we experience a moment of insight followed by a new understanding; this understanding makes it easy to remember and use the details of experience for they have become a part of us (23).

Effective sermon illustrations move the listener from perception to interaction (experience with) to understanding to retention of biblical truth. To better understand the

importance of sermon illustrations and their ability to lead people into interaction with biblical truth we must understand the affect television is having on how the average American listens.

Television and Memory Issues

A study of the statistics compiled by the group, TV Free America, reveals just how pervasive television has become in American life (see Figure 2.2 on page 26).

Television has become the dominant medium for information sharing in our culture. Children are spending 600 more hours per year watching television than they spend in school. The average American household has a TV on for seven hours and twelve minutes, and that was in 1998. Can we imagine that it hasn't increased since then?

One of the dangers of television is that it conditions humans to receive images in mass quantities without really critiquing or remembering them. Jerry Mander writes,

The technology of television and the inherent nature of the viewing experience actually inhibit learning as we usually think of it. Very little cognitive, recallable, analyzable, thought-based learning takes place while watching TV (205).

Referring to a study conducted by Merrelyn and Fred Emery, at the Center for Continuing Education, Australian National University at Canberra, Mander continues,

If the Emery's are correct, then their findings support the idea that television information enters unfiltered and whole, directly into the memory banks, but it is not available for conscious analysis, understanding or learning ... Whatever "knowledge" they gain is the sort that passes through the conscious regions where it would be available for recall and use (207).

The average American preacher will face audiences in which many have been conditioned, by hours of television watching, to automatically presume that all

information is primarily entertainment. As Neil Postman points out,

No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure ... A news show, to put it plainly, is a format for entertainment, not for education, reflection or catharsis (87-88).

Are you a TV addict?

What else could you be doing with 9 years of your life?

According to the A.C. Nielsen Co. (1998), the average American watches 3 hours and 46 minutes of TV each day (more than 52 days of nonstop TV-watching per year). By age 65 the average American will have spent nearly 9 years glued to the tube.

FAMILY LIFE

- 1) Percentage of US households with at least one television: 98
- 2) Percentage of US households with at least one VCR: 84
- 3) Percentage of US households with two TV sets: 34; three or more TV sets: 40
- 4) Hours per day that TV is on in an average US home: 7 hours, 12 minutes
- 5) Percentage of Americans that regularly watch television while eating dinner: 66
- 6) Number of videos rented daily in the US: 6 million
- 7) Number of public library items checked out daily: 3 million
- 8) Chance that an American falls asleep with the TV on at least three nights a week: 1 in 4
- 9) Percentage of Americans who say they watch too much TV: 49

CHILDREN & EDUCATION

- 1) Number of minutes per week that the average American child ages 2-11 watches television: 1,197
- 2) Number of minutes per week that parents spend in meaningful conversation with their children: 38.5
- 3) Percentage of children ages 5-17 who have a TV in their bedroom: 52
- 4) Percentage of children ages 2-5 who have a TV in their bedroom: 25
- 5) Percentage of day care centers that use TV during a typical day: 70
- 6) Percentage of parents who would like to limit their children's TV watching: 73
- 7) Hours per year the average American youth watches television: 1,500
- 8) Hours per year the average American youth spends in school: 900

Figure 2.2

The habit of being entertained has moved beyond just a national past time and has become the focus of far too many American lives. When we look at what assists the mind in creating memories, television, with its the rapid pace of image presentation, it's

failure to require cognitive reasoning, and its penchant for trivializing everything to mere entertainment, simply compounds the problem.

Americans are no longer satisfied to listen to a report of man's adventures in space; they want to see them. The language of our day is visual, not auditory. Television and computer monitors have forever changed the way humans communicate. As Calvin Miller says, "Pulpit language must now be done in 'television words'" (37).

Today's preacher faces an ominous challenge. He/she must therefore use visual and sensational (referring to the five senses) forms of communication, to capture the attention of his/her audience. Then he/she must somehow transfer that attention over to a more verbal and/or experiential form of communication. The preacher must draw the listener into involvement with the discourse in such a way that the listener experiences the truth proclaimed. This involvement allows the listener to better understand and to attach importance to the truth so that their ability to remember it is enhanced.

Therefore author recommends the occasional use of PDTs in sermons. PDT, or dramatic play, as a sermon illustration causes the listener to become involved in the lesson and to be granted the opportunity to discover truth for themselves. PDT allows the listener to "see" the sermon through their senses, rather than merely "hearing" it with their ears. Such use of drama techniques in the sermon should not be a cause for concern. However, it could be for some, so a brief look at the relationship between drama and the Church will help to reveal how appropriate it is.

Drama and the Church

In her book, 26 Ways to Use Drama in Teaching the Bible, Judy Smith shares the story of St. Francis of Assisi in December 1223 striving to bring the Christmas story alive

for his people. As he traveled through the town of Greccio to preach the Christmas Eve mass, the sight of local shepherds huddled around a fire watching over their flocks moved St. Francis.

When the folks arrived for service later that evening they found a crude manger accompanied by live animals and carved figures of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. "With that first manger scene, Francis made the people feel they really had been in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. Drama had come into the church!" (Smith 17).

While drama began long before the time of Jesus Christ, its roots have always resided in its relationship to worship. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, opening the curtain on the most colossal drama of all time—the drama of life. If this drama were to be staged, every scene would merit a drum roll: Day and night, dry land and water, vegetation, fish and fowl, animals, man and woman ... and God's pleasure (Litherland 1).

From its very beginning, drama originated not so much as a means of entertainment, but "*as an expression of and an aid to the religious life of primitive peoples*" (Moseley 10). As the Church grew from her infancy she employed evolving forms of drama. From liturgy to music, from readings to pageantry, the Church enjoyed the benefits of theater. Historically, the arts functioned as vehicles for expressing the soul's worship of the Creator and for religious instruction.

The Old Testament swells with the dramatic. The prophet Hosea's entire life—his courtship, marriage, and subsequent times of reconciliation with his adulterous wife—was one dramatic object lesson for Israel.

Likewise the many festivals of Israel dramatized past events in their history, chosen

to reinforce the people's determination to remember the Lord's faithfulness. Thus they learned to remain obedient to God. Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and other festivals were group simulations designed to educate the people. In fact the laying of the people's hands on the "scapegoat" was an excellent example of Participatory Drama Technique.

Our God, the Creator, understands that people learn best by doing, by experiencing and participating. Drama plays an important role in assisting individuals assimilate new data—knowledge and feelings. The Church cannot afford to ignore the example of Jesus' employment of dramatic forms of communication during His earthly ministry. His use of living lessons, like the cursing of the fig tree or Peter's walking on water, exhibit his understanding of man's need to participate in learning process. The use of play/drama in education transforms people from the inside out. Such transformations result in lasting behavior changes.

Many believe that church drama in the Middle Ages developed out of the Easter ritual of the ninth century. This form of drama differed from the Roman stage productions. "The drama of the Middle Ages was a new creation, a most characteristic thing, that arose in the very bosom of the Church, and was evolved from her liturgy" (Bloor 11-12).

Unfortunately as the popularity of drama in the Church grew, it moved from the sanctuary to the church courtyard. This change of physical location opened the door for the introduction of more of the secular and less of the spiritual material into the productions.

The Greeks dramatized everything about human life as they saw it. The Romans made a life of producing sensational events. Eventually, those serious about pursuing a deeper relationship with God, turned away from drama. The theater was branded as

frivolous, foolhardy, and a detriment to spiritual maturity. This soon gave way to the belief that all dramatic productions were base, probably deviant, and were to be avoided at all costs.

Consequently a wall materialized between the pursuit of Christian holiness and the arts. This wall would stand almost completely intact for more than three hundred years.

In the author's Quaker tradition Friends considered drama to be anathema, as late as 1908.

Friends believe that Christians should not go to see theatrical performances, first, because acting is essentially demoralizing to the actors ... Secondly, Friends are opposed to theatre-going because of its effect on those who go (Michael Graves 7).

This included unwholesome, artificial mental excitement, and questionable associations—things hostile to spiritual growth.

It would require more than sixty years before this taboo would be removed from drama in Quaker, as well as many other Christian, circles. The author can remember, as a boy, being sworn to secrecy by his mother for attending "The Sound of Music" in a movie theater while away from home on vacation lest his father lose his job at a Christian college. Today, many Christian families own a copy of the video version of the same movie.

The good news is that such prohibitions no longer exist in most denominations and churches today. However, the more deadly taboo, resulting from the buffoonery of the theater of the Middle Ages, still persists today—namely, that drama in the church is only for children, youth, and certain well-defined special occasions. The predominant idea is that serious adults, seeking spiritual maturity, do not participate in such juvenile endeavors, except at holidays. This remains the most difficult obstacle to overcome in attempting to reap the benefits of drama in the church.

Drama and Our Culture

Drama is the most popular form of communicating in our culture today. Whether an evening soap or a blaring talk show, drama plays an important part in our daily lives. We are primarily sensory creatures. Everything we know has entered into our field of knowledge via one or more of our five senses. Drama, over and against traditional rote teaching methods, employs the human senses and emotions.

But drama's benefits do not end there. Drama encourages individuality and sense-oriented involvement important to the full development of one's personality. It develops freedom of movement and vocal expression vital to communication. Drama encourages growth through expression of emotions and helps people clarify their feelings—about themselves and about others. Overall, drama is, in and of itself, very therapeutic.

Given these insights, the church must rediscover the wealth of learning avenues available in the wide variety of dramatic techniques. At present most church ministries rely on only one sensory device: the ear. One must question the soundness of such stewardship in light of the mission Christ has given the Church. Jesus did not limit himself to such teaching parameters. We must follow His example.

Jesus and the Use of Narrative

Jesus often employed narratives in his teachings. The purpose of these stories or parables was to draw the listener into interaction with the subject matter by playing upon their imaginations. For example, Jesus told a story of a lost sheep and a shepherd. Knowing that many in his audience were either shepherds, owned sheep, or had been shepherds at one time, Jesus engaged their minds and imaginations with his narrative.

As he told of how the sheep nibbled its way away from the flock, as he told of the shepherd searching through the crevices and over the rocks, Jesus drew upon the people's emotions and experiences in order to facilitate their connection with the truth of his lesson. This simple story created a process whereby the truth could be encoded or connected with the people's emotions and experiences, allowing it to be stored more efficiently in their memories.

Stephen Littlejohn reminds us that,

Dramatism and narrative are two closely associated movements that fit well under the interactionist umbrella. Theories of dramatism and narrative deal with one of the most important ways in which people use symbols and create meaning, the story. *Dramatism* is distinguished by its heavy reliance on a theatrical metaphor, and *narrative* is characterized by its use of story sequence (177).

Interaction theory of communication simply says that “meaning is created through and sustained by interaction ... (Littlejohn 169). Drama, in many of the same ways as narrative, engages the listener's emotions and experiences. When this occurs, the listener interacts with the truth being communicated and the process of retaining it is enhanced.

Drama and Worship

Duane Hatfield suggests that worship be experienced in three primary ways: adoration, communion and enlargement (75-76). In true adoration the worshipper discovers the wonder and beauty and power of the presence of God and is compelled to bow, physically and spiritually, in humble awe before his/her Creator. The Bible calls this the “fear the Lord”. One is not frightened, apprehensive, or deceived, but touched by the glory of God.

In some ways worship is indeed a dramatic event. Rightfully understood worship

is a performance by believers, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, prompted by the pastor, for the benefit and glory of God, the audience. As each believer “plays” their part, God is honored receiving the adoration and service of his follower. Worship frees the believer, like David in the Old Testament, to love, revere, and worship God with unfettered passion. Drama is a crucial part of worship.

Therefore we must grapple with the question, “How do we begin to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of a broader use of drama in the church?” One way is to remove the erroneous myth, that religious plays or cantata’s are the only type of drama available to adults in the church from our thinking. Another way is to help adults understand the benefits of creative spontaneity and dramatic “play.” Drama, and in particular creative drama, provides a way to release the untapped potential of personal discovery within each person in the church.

Creative Drama

What is creative drama? The difficulty in answering this question stems from the fact that everyone seems to have his or her own terminology for this craft. Some call it informal drama, others call it developmental drama, spontaneous drama, improvisational drama, theater games, play-making, role-playing, social drama, kinesthetic learning ... the list goes on.

However an underlying agreement of what we are trying to name exists. As opposed to formal drama or the production of plays, developmental drama centers on spontaneous, impromptu creativity. Christie Kaaland-Wells defines it as “an informal process-oriented form of drama which can be used as an instructional approach to learning in many subject areas” (1). There are no scripts, no stated goals, no rigid forms, no need for

an audience, *per se*. In fact the members of the audience are both patrons and actors.

Sue Jennings, who calls this facet of drama, “remedial drama,” says, “In its widest sense drama can encompass all means of creative expression” (1). She goes on to explain that “in order to communicate satisfactorily the individual must feel free to express himself” (2). Often such freedom is best found in the atmosphere created by creative drama. This kind of drama is participatory, focused on experiencing rather than performing—a process rather than a product.

During creative drama exercises all three facets of a person come into play: body, mind and spirit. The mind thinks, the heart feels, and the spirit is released to express itself through bodily action. Creative drama reinforces, within the performer, many attributes beneficial to the Christian life. Acceptance, love of self and others, a deeper understanding of humans, and released, balanced emotions are just a few of the benefits therapists have witnessed through the use of creative drama techniques.

Creative drama employs a number of theatrical mediums. It can be as simple as playing a game or as intense as pantomime. It can involve the release of tension through improvisation or it can consist of the discovery of profound truths through simulation. Any activity that encourages the individual to employ his or her creative powers can in some way be used as informal or creative drama.

Improvisation is the key to creative drama. Whether we are in the warm-up stage or the main event, improvisation (lit. “not provided for”), frees one for discovery. Writing about this need for freedom, Milton Polsky says, “Inside us all, there is a powder keg of untapped creativity ready to burst forth into expression ... The creative act lights up a new way of looking at things, giving life fresh pleasure and meaning” (ix). In the

Church, this is often referred to as “serendipity.”

Given the very nature of church life and ministry we cannot afford to ignore such an effective learning technique. It must be utilized in the church.

“Religious truths can be made real only when they are demonstrated in actual life situations ... Drama, when it becomes alive ... affects the intellectual and emotional responses of both [audience and performer]” (Barnard 13).

Six areas where creative drama may be used in the church quickly come to mind: worship, preaching, teaching, fellowship, counseling, and outreach. In each of these areas, the concern of this paper centers on adult formats, for adequate emphasis on children and youth formats already exists in the Church.

As we turn our attention to the use of creative drama in the Church the words of Floy Barnard capture our attention, “It is essential ... that the worth of dramatics to the church constituency be carefully evaluated before it is incorporated into the program of a church. If it is to be used it must have a real excuse for being” (50). A very real reason for using creative drama in the sermon, in the form of a PDT, is to garner the listener’s attention and involve them in the experience of discovering and remembering God’s truths.

Participatory Drama Technique and the Sermon

The focus of this study is on the non-performance, audience-participation side of creative drama. In research done so far the author has not been able to identify a previously assigned term for what he now calls “Participatory Drama Technique.” PDT is a hybrid developed out of the author’s experience with creative drama and preaching. PDT is a sermon illustration vehicle that involves every listener in the message through a

participation “tool.” PDT covers a wide range of creative drama techniques that can be adapted for use in the sermon context. PDT can be as simple as role-play, like having everyone remove his or her shoes during the reading of the biblical account of the burning bush. Or it can be the distribution of salt shakers during a sermon. As members of the audience compare the taste of the outside of the shaker (representing the gospel kept within the walls of the church) with the taste of the salt shaken into their hands (representing sharing the good news with the world outside the church walls) they realize that salt in a shaker does not maximize its potential. PDT allows the participant to enter into the sermon in a physical and emotional manner.

We often forget that God placed in us the need, perhaps even the instinct, of creative play. Like all other instincts, the need to be creative demands an opportunity for expression. Drama, and in particular PDT, affords everyone the chance to express this natural ability.

The need to develop proper attitudes towards drama in the overall ministry of the Church remains a formidable task. The idea that drama, in the Church, is mainly for children, youth and certain special events will not freely relinquish its foothold.

Dr. Michael Graves challenges us when he says, “it may be that a theology of immediate revelation naturally leads to improvisational theatre just as it naturally led early Quakers to impromptu preaching” (13-14). Integrity insists that either the Holy Spirit is able to anoint impromptu, creative expression or he is not. If we believe in extemporaneous preaching, then it is illogical to deny the anointing of improvised drama techniques. The key is to keep the proper focus on the purpose of drama in the church. Drama is an effective form of teaching, not merely entertainment.

The preacher’s interest is not titillating a group with warm, fuzzy experiences, or

helping them get to know one another better. The preacher's concern is to find that subtle intersection between the text and one's own life where the sparks fly, insights are born, and people encounter the living God speaking to them at the point of their need. Anything less, no matter how "inspired" the creativity, belittles our Creator.

As a Quaker, the author has always been acutely aware of the Spirit's ability to anoint any believer in a service to proclaim God's message. On occasion, during the "Quiet Time" of a service in the author's churches, the Spirit has anointed a lay person to stand and proclaim God's truth in a manner that propelled the congregation into an encounter with the presence of the Living Christ.

In this practice, the aim is not to remove qualified preachers and prepared sermons from our services. The goal is to give the Spirit every opportunity to work in our midst, challenging us to greater obedience to the Word of God. Quakers understand that the preacher may not always be the vehicle chosen for the task. Likewise, they understand that the spoken word may not always be the instrument. At times the message will be communicated better through what is not said, than what is.

However, preaching remains the primary method God employs to bring people into an encounter with His truth and His Word. The goal of such preaching is the understanding and application of divine truth.

The goal of creative preaching is to tell God's words and deeds from the Bible in such a manner that the sermon becomes the medium through which those continue into the present, and we experience them, and they exert their saving influence on our lives (Achtemeier 47).

Creative biblical preaching can proclaim the redeeming work of God and provide avenues for the listener to discover their need for change. The response may be acceptance of the

gift or growth depending upon the audience. Either way, a sermon must be remembered, if it is to be applied.

Participatory Drama Technique and the Adult Listener

Understanding how adults learn and how our culture has conditioned them to listen will reveal the importance of employing every form of communication available to us today. This includes PDT.

The preacher who simply gives his people the Bible is not performing his rightful function. They have the Bible without him. It is his task to bring out its meaning *as he sees it*. And dramatization is a very effective aid in performing this task (Jones 110).

Remembering occurs when an individual discovers something that makes sense to him/her. Learning in our culture has become more image-focused. The most profound things in life are often encountered and acquired in ways language can neither explain nor facilitate. For this reason, a preacher must consider the employment of dramatic methods in order to maximize the opportunity for the Spirit to open up great truths and make them relevant to the people in the pew.

This is why Jesus often employed object lessons in his preaching. They were safe and did not directly offend the audience. However, the object lesson did several things that are essential to communication that affects behavior. The properly employed object lesson provided food for thought, dramatized real-life situations, and allowed the listener to enter vicariously, through their senses and imaginations, into certain experiences.

This is where using dramatic techniques in sermons affords the preacher a wider opportunity to affect his audience. Pam Barrager points out,

Discovering biblical principles and then applying them in order to grow to maturity is most effectively accomplished when the learner is drawn into

active involvement with the principles you are communicating. For that reason, creative drama as a teaching method reaches out to stimulate and actively involves young people in the learning process.” (11).

The effectiveness of drama to stimulate response applies to people of all ages, not merely youth and children. All of life is drama, in some fashion or another. Therefore it only stands to reason that life is best understood in terms of drama (Jones 24).

Jesus used parables, object lessons and other forms of sermon illustration to allow people to see, hear, feel, and experience the fullness of the issues he addressed.

Preaching today can accomplish these same effects through a number of venues: storytelling, audio-visuals, object lessons, and PDTs.

J. Daniel Baumann says that preaching is “the communication of biblical truth by man to men with the explicit purpose of eliciting behavioral change” (8). Adults prefer self-discovery forms of learning and the knowledge they acquire through self-discovery is retained longer. The idea of preaching as simply a one-way lecture is not only simplistic, but also dangerous. This kind of thinking restricts the possibility of actually tapping into, by both preacher and the Holy Spirit, the vast reservoir of potential learning and behavioral change available in adults.

Donald Joy says, “Our traditional limited ‘expository mode’ has probably been the product of laziness; we were not so attentive to Jesus’ method with men as we were to grasp and proclaim the essence of what He taught” (152). Joy suggests that we can formulate the process or stages of what he terms as “meaningful teaching” into four steps. These are

1. Learning requires that the path of a student’s interest is brought to intersect with a given idea, concept, or body of information.

2. Once a learner has intersected ... he needs help to investigate and work the field. This becomes the principal phase of the learning formula for the acquisition of new information and for processing it into working principles.

3. The third obligation in meaningful learning is to infer—to draw suppositions from the findings one can apply to life.

4. The final work is to implement these understandings in actual practice/life. He provides a very useful model of how this life changing learning occurs. Inductive learning begins with the understandings, feelings, emotions, issues and activities in the concrete. Deductive learning takes ideas and hypotheses and attempts to rationalize applications (Figure 2.3 on page 41).

As we can see, in Joy's diagram, the learning experience occurs when life is intersected by new ideas. This study is concerned with the induction or upper half of the figure. Joy suggests that the point at which the two triangles meet represents discovery (150). Here is where understanding occurs and retention begins.

Preaching, to affect change in the listener, must find a way to create an environment where this can occur. This means the preacher must strive not just to speak words of truth. Rather, the preacher must find avenues that encourage the listener to “intersect” life, as they know it, with life as it can become in Christ Jesus. PDT provides a wonderful and effective method for prompting such intersections. For in the experience of participating in the dramatic “play” of the illustration, an atmosphere conducive to self-discovery of truth, and hence insight, is created.

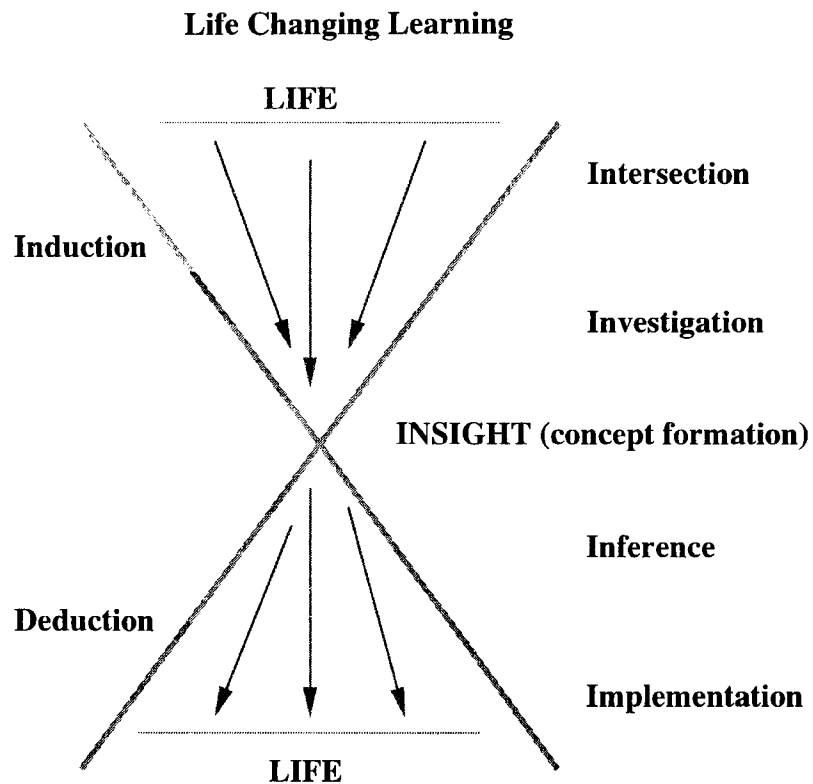


Figure 2.3

Adult learners, as has been stated, are self-directed, they prefer to view themselves as in control of their lives and their learning. They come into the learning process after a lifetime of accumulating large reservoirs of experience. Adults are interested in immediate application—knowledge that is linked to everyday life (Hestenes 101-102). The use of PDT in the learning process, and in the sermon, provides an instrument that draws upon several of these attributes of adult learning.

Three Examples of PDTs

Here are three quick examples of how PDT can work in a sermon. First, in a sermon on the woman caught in adultery, the focus is on the potential “stones” we each carry every day of life. When we encounter “adulterous persons” in our lives we face a decision, to stone or not to. Imagine the effect of having a rather weighty stone in the

hands of each listener throughout the sermon. As the sermon draws to a close the preacher could ask each one what they wish to do with the stones of their life—carry them, ready to use, or drop them and be free to forgive. Imagine the personal discovery as each one wrestles with the hard stone in his/her hand. Imagine the power of the moment as stones begin to “thunk” across the sanctuary. The author employed this particular PDT in the series of sermons preached for this study.

Second, in the reading of the text from Matthew 9:20-22, the woman with the “issue of blood,” the congregation was asked to stand and bend at the waste in a ninety degree fashion. Imagine the self-discoveries, as people were encouraged to imagine how the woman felt as they listen to the text. This PDT actually occurred in a chapel service at Asbury Theological Seminary. Barbara Riddle, District Superintendent in Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, though she did not identify it as a PDT, employed this technique while reading this text at the beginning of her sermon. She had everyone bend over as she read it.

The author had occasion to speak with a few of those who experienced it and they indicated that they still easily recalled the emotions triggered by this dramatic technique.

Third, a pastor, arriving at a new congregation, wants to emphasize the need for unity in diversity. As people come into the sanctuary, each one receives a short piece of reed. During the sermon, from Ephesians 2:18-22, the pastor takes a handful of reeds. After questioning what can be done with a handful of reeds, he produces a beautiful basket. In the basket is a delicious looking loaf of fresh bread. He/she talks about the need for the church to be woven together into a wonderful basket able to carry the Bread of Life to the world. He/she closes by inviting people to bring their reeds, representing

themselves and their talents, to the altar signifying their willingness to allow God to weave them into a Bread-carrying basket.

Using Participatory Drama Technique Today

The possibilities seem endless. However, like any form of non-traditional preaching, one must exercise great care. Creative drama methods, like the PDT, must never be employed simply for the novelty of the experience, and that is a real danger. They must only be used when the biblical text indicates the appropriateness of the mechanism. Fred Craddock's guidelines for illustrations are equally applicable to the employment of PDTs,

1. Locate or create the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar.
2. Make certain the analogy between the thought and the illustration of the thought is clear.
3. Keep illustrations simple, but not small or silly.
4. Do not "push" the illustration upon the hearer; Keep it conversational.
5. Leave the illustration alone; if it served its purpose, good; if not, it cannot be repaired or redeemed.
6. Trust the illustration and present it without apology or verbal scaffolding (204-205).

The changes in today's audience demand that preachers do all they can to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. The use of a PDT in the sermon aids the preacher in making the sermon clear, refreshing, and practical.

As indicated earlier, one of the major obstacles to the employment of the PDT in sermons is the errant belief that drama is for kids. Most adults will be initially threatened

by any attempt to introduce PDTs in sermons. They have been conditioned over the years to accept two errant beliefs which exacerbate the situation: one, adults don't play or need the emotional benefits of dramatic play, and two, sermons are words spoken by a clergy person which should basically entertain and occasionally enlighten.

In addition to these, the aforementioned stigma, concerning the relationship of drama and the church, remains. If a PDT is employed in the sermon, the preacher must educate people concerning the difference between true entertainment and modern amusement. To entertain means to capture the audience's attention and retain it for a period of time. What one does with that window of opportunity determines whether the entertainment is a mere diversion or the doorway to a life changing encounter with God's truth. Carefully and craftily employed PDTs in sermons ensure that they are entertaining, in the proper sense of the word.

John Naisbitt says, "We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge" (17). Owen Edwards, in his article, entitled "Infoswamp," about the overwhelming amount of information available to the average person, says, "Information now is constant, inescapable, infinitely intrusive and fast losing its power to captivate, or even attract attention" (15).

Could it be that one of the reasons people are so attracted to a more charismatic style of worship today is that they come looking, not for more information about God, but for an encounter, an experience with the Living God? The more charismatic styles of worship certainly are participatory with all the hand-clapping, hand-raising, and even dancing in the Spirit.

Today's sermons must do more than provide information; they must precipitate an experience in the heart and mind of the listener. Sermons must put people in touch with the reality of God's presence and His power. Preachers must help people experience God, not just think about God.

The risk involved in attempting to employ these techniques is a reality. If a PDT comes off badly, or is poorly constructed, it can have several negative ramifications: loss of attention, not only in the current sermon but also in the next several sermons, loss of respect, and even possibly loss of employment, and so forth.

The preacher who wishes to employ such creative methods in the sermon must build a level of trust with his/her congregation. The trust factor is the greatest asset or enemy of experimental preaching. If the people have learned that they can rely on the preacher to be faithful to the text and the needs of the people, they are more likely to be open to these methods. The benefits acquired are worth the effort put forth.

Summary

Preaching in the coming age must provide an atmosphere where persons can encounter the presence and power of God. The preacher can no longer assume that the average listener will do anything more than open their mind and allow information to pour in without really paying attention. Likewise, the preacher cannot assume that the average listener will have a biblical background.

As American culture becomes even more pagan, and more television and image focused, the average worshipper is not likely to automatically accept the authority of the Bible as God's Word and thus listen with a peaked interest. Neither will people instinctively be ready to pay attention without first being "entertained." The sharp

preacher will remember that adults prefer to discover truth for themselves and that self-discovery is a very effective way of placing information into long term memory.

Therefore, the work of the preacher remains a challenge—engaging attention and communicating divine truth to a hostile or, at best, lethargic community. To capture the attention of such an audience and engage them in process of discovering truth, the preacher may add to his arsenal, PDTs.

As more and more preachers perceive the need to produce sermons that communicate, rather than charm, and sermons that produce disciples of Jesus Christ, rather than pew potatoes, they will begin to take advantage of those communication instruments which engage the listener in the learning process. PDT, drawing on the power of creative play, the imagination, the emotions, and the five senses, is a powerful communication instrument. PDT encourages emotional as well as physical participation. PDT is a visual language fluent among the children of the video age. In many ways, PDT is a very promising tool for the preacher of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

As our culture becomes more dependent upon television and computer images our preaching must become more visual as well as auditory. The problem addressed by this study is how to effectively communicate sermons in a culture dominated by the visual media. In an image-based society people are able to perceive images at an increasing rate, but they lose the ability to think critically—to give meaning to the images.

Bellah says, “Television is much more interested in how people feel than in what they think. What they think might separate us, but how they feel draws us together” (281). As a result, our society has bought into the idea that feelings take precedent over thoughts. This problem affords the preacher an opportunity—to reach people with biblical truth using PDT to engage their attention and emotions.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the relationship of PDT in the sermon to listener comprehension and retention of biblical truth. This evaluation will be done through the study of a local congregation’s response to sermons with PDTs and those without.

Statement of the Research Questions

The following research and operational questions are addressed in this study.

Research Question 1: Has the subject remembered the sermon, its theme and/or main points?

Operational Question 1: Was the subject present when the sermon under review was preached?

Operational Question 2: Does the subject claim to remember the sermon after

being given the title and date of the sermon?

Research Question 2: Is there a difference between the listener's ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points, when a PDT is used and when one is not used?

Operational Question 1: What element in the sermon does the listener credit for their recall?

Operational Question 2: Is there any one element of the sermon that is credited, significantly more than the other elements, with listener recall?

Research Question 3: Can those who claim to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points substantiate their claim?

Operational Question 1: Does the listener identify any specifics about the element they claim as the reason for their recall?

Operational Question 2: Can the listener support his/her claim with statements that reveal a factual recall of the sermon, its theme and/or main points?

Methodology

This study is concerned with the relationship of PDT in the sermon to listener recall. This study employed a series of questionnaires distributed among the subjects six weeks after each of a series of six sermons. In particular, a pair of sermons sharing the same or a similar, biblical lesson/truth, were preached, then another pair, and another for a total of six sermons.

In each set, a sermon was presented then a month or two later, another sermon, on the same or a similar truth. Each set of sermons contained one sermon employing a PDT and one sermon not employing a PDT (Figure 3.1 page 49). The author varied the pattern

of PDT use in each set of sermons so as to avoid the possibility that the listener's recall

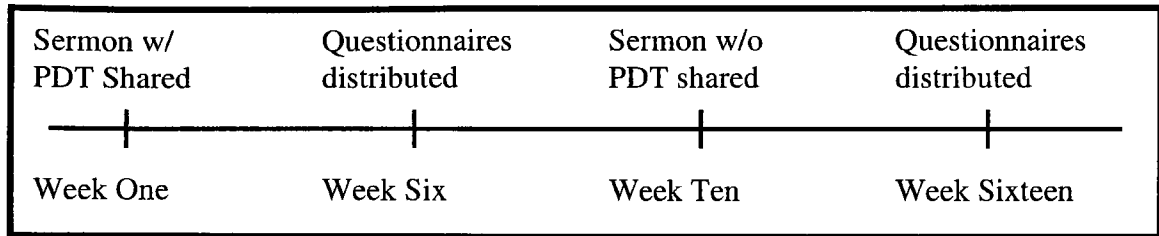


Figure 3.1

Sample Timeline for One Set of Sermons

might be based on the close proximity of the sermons, rather than the use or non-use of a PDT. The pattern used was this: in the first set of sermons the sermon without the PDT was first, in the second set the sermon with the PDT was first, and in the last set the sermon without the PDT was first again.

In addition to this, the author allowed the Youth Pastor of his church to preach one of the sermons, the third sermon or first sermon of the second set, which did include a PDT. By doing this, the author removed one limitation of this study. The use of a sermon not preached by the author allowed for two styles of preaching, two personalities to be involved in the study. This eliminated the possibility that one preaching style was responsible for any differences in listener recall. The level of recall based upon the use of a PDT could be compared between the two preachers, as well as between the different sets of sermons.

Six weeks after each sermon was presented, a questionnaire was distributed to all the participants in the worship service that day. At the conclusion of the service, respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire, during the morning announcement segment of the service. After answering the questions, the respondents were asked to

place the questionnaires in the offering bags as they were passed. After the collection was taken, the ushers accumulated the questionnaires and returned them to the pastor/author.

The questionnaires were designed using both multiple-choice and open-ended, or short essay type questions. Each questionnaire (Figure 3.2 page 51) consisted of the same six questions designed to measure the degree to which the subject remembered the sermon, its theme and/or main points.

Population

The population for this study consisted of the members and regular attendees of the author's church, Gateway Friends Church a church plant project of the Friends Church Southwest Yearly Meeting. The church is located in the city of Corona, in Riverside County, California.

Of those attending, the median age is forty. Around seventy percent of the congregation is either pre-Christians or recent converts. Thirty percent have a long relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church. The subjects for this study were chosen on a voluntary basis and informed of the intention of the pastor to perform this study in conjunction with his doctoral studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Returning a questionnaire indicated a willingness to participate in the study. The surveys did not ask for a name or identification of the individual. This anonymity vehicle was designed to make the respondent feel free to answer honestly.

The sermons were shared with all in attendance at the morning worship services on the appointed Sundays. The questionnaires were distributed to each adult and teenager in attendance at the morning services six weeks after the sermon's presentation. It should be noted that the average attendance of the morning worship services at Gateway Friends

Sermon Questionnaire	
<p>Pastor Don is in the process of attaining his Doctor of Ministries degree from Asbury Theological Seminary in KY. In order to complete his project, he needs our help. Six weeks after each of six specific sermons, this survey will be passed out. Please complete the survey to the best of your ability. Then place in the offering bags later. Thanks!</p>	
1.	<p>Were you present on Sunday, January 31st, when Don shared a message entitled, "The Power of Forgiveness"?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, continue on. <input type="checkbox"/> No, thank you for your time.</p>
2.	<p>Do you remember the theme or main points of the sermon?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, continue on. <input type="checkbox"/> No, thank you for your time.</p>
3.	<p>To what would you attribute your recollection of the sermon?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> the title <input type="checkbox"/> main points of the sermon</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> a memorable illustration <input type="checkbox"/> personal notes taken</p>
4.	<p>Please elaborate on your answer above. _____</p> <p>_____</p>
5.	<p>Did the sermon impact your way of thinking/living? How? _____</p> <p>_____</p>
6.	<p>To what would you attribute this? _____</p>

Figure 3.2

Church, during the time this study was conducted, was one hundred and seven. That figure includes adults, teens and children. Therefore, the number of questionnaires distributed and collected was very limited.

Instrumentation

The questionnaires, noted above, were used with the population to operationalize the variables in this study. The rationale for employing a questionnaire lies in its ability to procure data that lies beyond physical reach. Two reasons support this premise. One, the questionnaire's ability to be handed to people, frees the researcher of the need to invest time and travel performing interviews. Second, a questionnaire is an impersonal

investigation tool that allows the individual questioned to be free to answer objectively.

The questionnaire was self-administered. As stated above, the respondents were given the questionnaire at the beginning of the worship service, then asked to complete it and turn it in, at the close of the service. This also allowed for the avoidance of interviews and this approach sanctioned unencumbered objectivity on the part of the individual questioned.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship of the use of a PDT in the sermon to the listener's ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points. Three essential questions were considered as a part of the questionnaires,

1. Has the subject remembered the sermon?
2. What element of the sermon does the listener credit with his/her ability to remember?
3. Can the listener substantiate their claim by way of a written answer to questions four, five or six on the questionnaire?

Respondents were not given any formal instructions on how to answer each of the questionnaire's questions in order to avoid biasing their answers.

Data Collection

The procedure for collecting data from the population was as follows. An announcement was written up in the church's newsletter the month the first sermon was to be preached. Church newsletters are sent to all members, regular attendees, and visitors of the church. This announcement briefly explained the nature of this project and the importance of the congregation's contribution to it. The announcement also sketched out the format of the study: a sermon followed by a questionnaire, and another sermon

followed by yet another questionnaire. In addition, public announcements were provided via a data projector in the sanctuary, on the big screen up front, before and after the service. The announcement was also shared verbally from the pulpit.

The exact nature of the study, the use or non-use of a PDT in a sermon, was not disclosed at the beginning of the study, in order to avoid any possible bias that might occur from such knowledge.

A sermon, without a PDT, was presented to the congregation in a morning worship service. Six weeks later, questionnaires seeking feedback on that sermon were distributed with the bulletins before the service. Those choosing to respond placed their completed questionnaires in the offering bags as they were passed at the close of the service.

A second sermon on the same or a similar topic, but using a PDT, was presented at least one month later. Six weeks later another questionnaire was distributed with the bulletins seeking feedback on the second sermon. These questionnaires were collected in the same fashion—that is, it was placed in the offering bags at the close of the service.

This process was repeated twice for a total of six sermons. Each questionnaire shared the date the sermon was preached and the title of the sermon (Figure 3.2 page 51).

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable of this study was participation by subjects during the sermon series, that is listening to the sermon and then responding on the appropriate, corresponding questionnaire. The dependent variables measured in this study were the subject's ability to remember the sermon and substantiate that remembrance.

Control

Bias is a “given” in any attempt to gather information. The danger in employing a questionnaire arises from the temptation to concern oneself with the percentage of returned forms to the detriment of the quality of the question and answer vehicles. In this particular study two sets of bias need to be considered.

The population could have a number of biases arising from the individual contexts of each listener. Influences and conditions exist that we cannot control and can distort the data. For example, some of the subjects may be avid listeners of radio preachers. If a sermon was shared on the radio on a similar text or theme, the memory of that sermon may interfere with the subject’s memory of the study’s sermon. Likewise, subjects may not be in the best physical or emotional condition for paying attention due to some personal circumstance. This would certainly have an affect on their ability to recall a sermon. Therefore this study acknowledges the likelihood of biases and takes into consideration in formulating conclusions.

Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative tool—a series of six questionnaires asking the same questions about each of six different sermons. The first two questions were simple “yes” or “no” inquiries. The second question was answered only if the first question were answered in the affirmative. Likewise, the third question was answered only if the second question were answered in the affirmative. However, it was a multiple-choice question, allowing the respondent to identify what element of the sermon he/she felt was the cause of his/her remembrance. The elements were limited to four: the title, the main points, a memorable illustration, or personal notes taken during the sermon.

The remaining three questions were open-ended, or short essay questions asking the respondent, in a few words or sentences, to further substantiate their claim of remembering the sermon and what they attributed that recall to. Employing a brief essay format allowed each respondent to elaborate on his/her answer to question three for the purpose of seeing if he/she could substantiate his/her claim.

Unfortunately, the number of responses to each of the six sermons was too low for this study to offer a valid quantitative or statistical statement. Therefore, the data was analyzed for qualitative value, rather than statistical or analytical value, and this became a study descriptive.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to evaluate the use of a PDT in a sermon as it relates to the listener's ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points. To that end, three essential questions were considered:

1. Has the subject remembered the sermon?
2. What element of the sermon does the listener credit with his/her ability to remember?
3. Can the listener substantiate their claim by way of a written answer?

In order to answer these questions, a series of sermons were presented and a correlating series of questionnaires were distributed and collected. From these questionnaires, the collected data provides the basis for the author's findings in this study. This chapter reports the results of the study.

The data is presented in the following manner. First, some preliminary matters will be mentioned, the particular the demographic make-up of the subjects. Second, the actual results will be presented. And finally, significant findings will be stated. It should be noted, here, that the term "significant findings" must be clearly defined.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the term "significant findings," or the term "significant," is limited, in its scope, to mean any observable perceptions or trends noticeable in this study. The author does not purport to make any exhaustive or comprehensive claims about the use or non-use of PDTs in sermons based upon the data collected in this study. The author simply intends to make note of what happened at this time, at this church, during this series of sermons. For a more definitive statement,

further research and a larger population must be employed.

Preliminary Matters

Before moving to the results of the study, the demographic make-up of the subjects must be discussed. Gateway Friends Church is a church plant in Corona, California started by the author, his family and two other families from a sponsoring church, Canyon Hills Friends Church, located in Yorba Linda, California. A small core group was then gathered through a telemarketing campaign and an email advertisement. The express purpose of this new church was to reach the unchurched and dechurched people of Corona, CA.

“Unchurched” indicates people who have never regularly attended church before. “Dechurched” indicates people who regularly attended church at one time in their life, but who have not been regularly attending for several years, even decades. For example, some people at Gateway Friends Church attended other churches when they were children, but then walked away after high school or college.

Many of the people participating in this study had not attended church either at all or for up to thirty years before attending Gateway Friends Church. At this time of this study, seventy percent of the people at Gateway Friends Church were either dechurched or unchurched before becoming regulars at Gateway Friends Church.

Anonymity is a strong value for these folks. For example, over the past two years, less than ten percent of the distributed directory information sheets have been returned to the church office for church database updates. The small number of responses to the sermon questionnaires is consistent with the church’s history and pattern of limited response to any kind of survey. This factor, and perhaps others, like indifference, a large

number of youth in the service, etc., resulted in only twenty-five percent of the distributed questionnaires being returned for processing.

It must also be noted, here, that some respondents, even though asked to indicate only one (the most important) element of the sermon, which they felt was the reason for their recall of the sermon, gave indication of two, and sometimes three, elements. All responses marked were tallied and considered therefore the numbers do not always add up exactly the same. For example, there may have been five respondents but eight responses cited in the data.

The Results of the Study

The problem addressed by this study centers around the increased dependence of our culture on television and images. An image-based culture tends to focus on passive observation rather than critical thinking and facts. The use of PDTs in sermons offers the preacher an opportunity to reach people with biblical truth by involving their five senses, their imaginations, and past experiences. PDTs also transform the listener from a passive receptor to active participant in the sermon. When this occurs, the listener is more likely to efficiently encode the input, that is the sermon or biblical truth, which makes it easier to make the input a long-term memory.

To check this hypothesis, three research questions were asked.

Research Question 1

The first research question deals with the issue of retention: Has the listener remembered the sermon, its theme and/or main points? The answer to this question indicates whether or not the sermon has entered into the long-term memory of listener.

The first question on the questionnaire was designed to isolate those who were present when the sermon was preached, from those who were not. The results of the questionnaires indicate that, for the six sermons shared, seventy-six out of one hundred and ten respondents were present when the sermons in question were given (Figure 4.1).

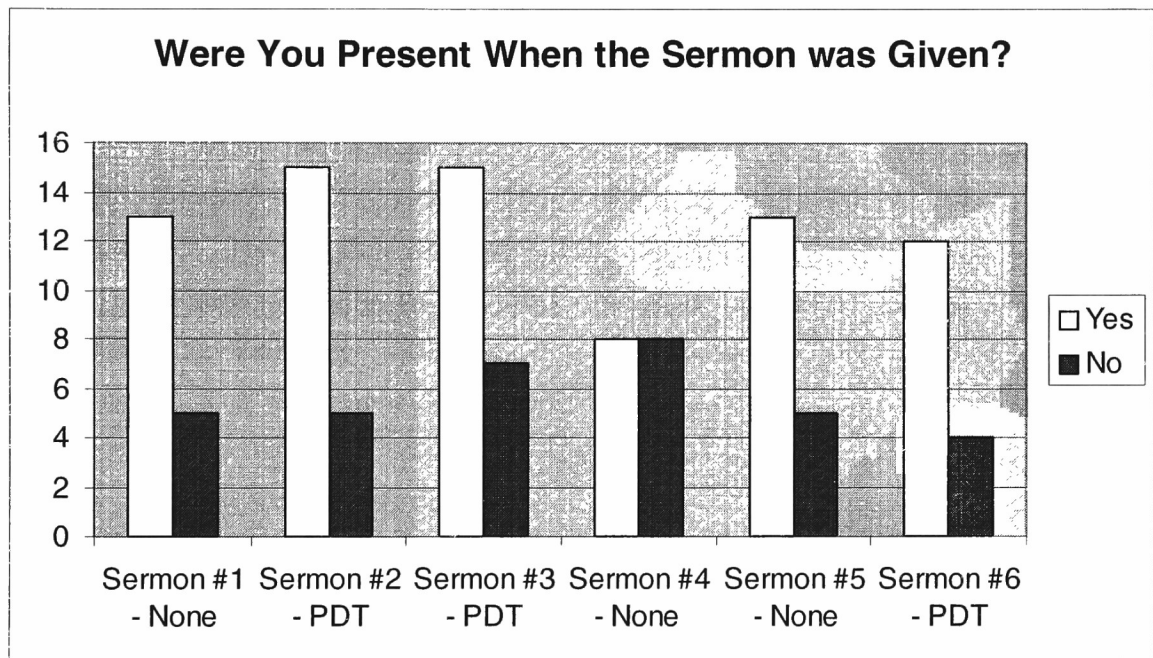


Figure 4.1

Of those seventy-six, present when the sermons were shared, fifty-three claimed to remember the sermon, its theme and/or main points. Of those fifty-three, thirty-two were for sermons employing a PDT, and twenty-one, were for the sermons not using a PDT (Figure 4.2 page 60).

Research Question 2

The second research question dealt with the element of the sermon that the respondents indicated was responsible for their recall. This question looks at the reason subjects believed was responsible for their remembering the sermons. Subjects were asked to pick one of four elements of the sermon as the reason for their recall of the

sermon, its theme and/or main points. These were the title, the main points, a memorable illustration, or personal notes.

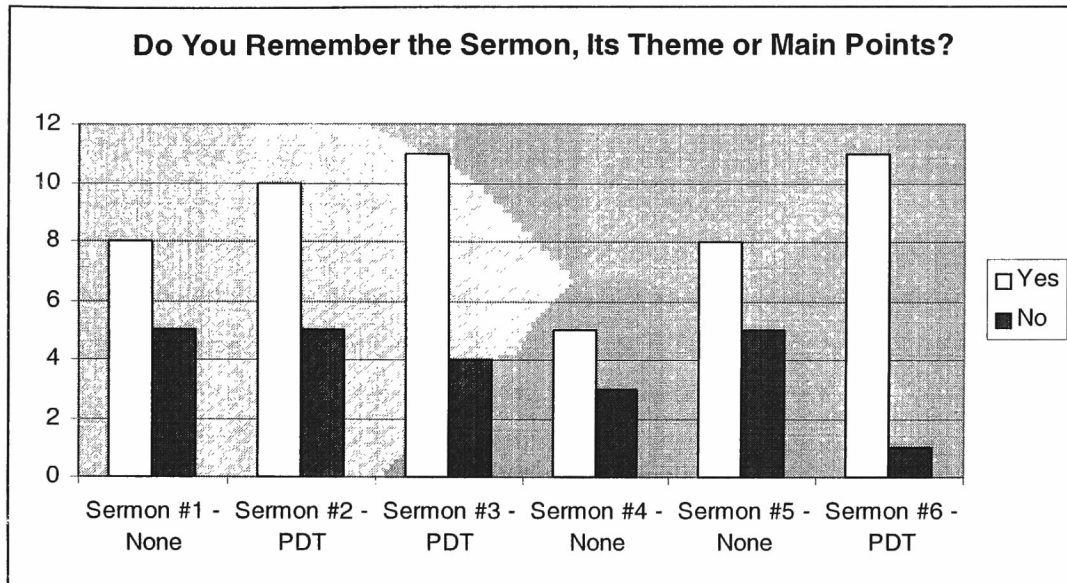


Figure 4.2

Though the study asked people to only indicate one element, several respondents indicated more than one. Hence, there were thirty indications given by twenty-one respondents for the sermons without a PDT. Likewise, there were thirty-six indications given by thirty-two respondents for the sermons with a PDT.

The study found that, out of thirty responses for sermons without the PDT, ten indicated the sermon title as the reason for the recall, ten the main points of the sermon, four a memorable illustration, and five the taking of personal notes during the sermon (Figure 4.3 page 61).

In sermons with the PDT, the study found that, out of thirty-six responses, seven were attributed to the title, five to the main points, nineteen to a memorable illustration, and five to personal notes taken (Figure 4.3 page 61).

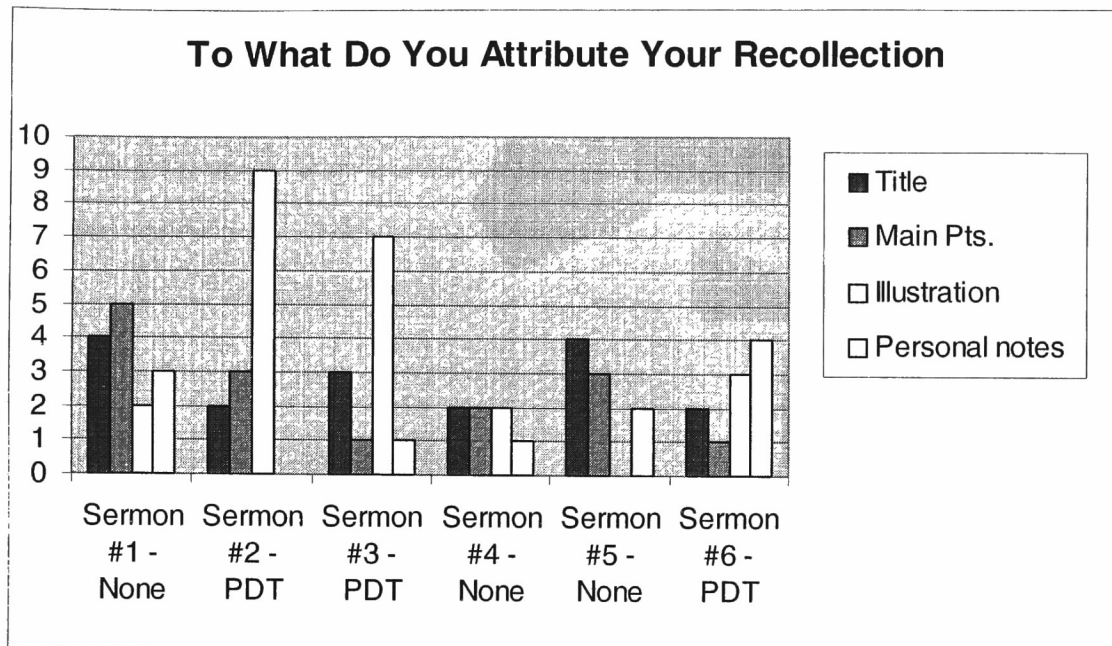


Figure 4.3

The data revealed that, in sermons containing a PDT, the illustration was indicated by a significantly higher number of respondents, when compared to all the other types of elements. Nineteen, out of thirty-six responses, in the sermons employing a PDT, indicated the illustration as the prime element attributing to their recall. This compares to only seven indications of the title, only five of the main points, and only five of personal notes taken.

The nineteen indications of an illustration, looms even more significantly when compared to the elements indicated in sermons without a PDT. Out of twenty-nine people responding for sermons not containing a PDT, ten indicated the title was the reason for their recall, ten indicated the main points, four indicated an illustration, and six indicated personal notes (Figure 4.3).

Research Question 3

The third research question inquires whether or not the respondents can corroborate their claim of recall. It is one thing to say, “Yes, I remember.” It is another thing to be able to back up that claim with specifics that confirm the claim. The study found, as stated above, that fifty-three of the seventy-six respondents, who were present when the sermons were shared, claimed to recall the sermon. Of those fifty-three, only thirty-four claims were upheld with corroborating statements given in answer to questions four, five and six on the questionnaires.

In sermons without a PDT, ten responses indicated the title as the reason for the recall. However, only one respondent was able to corroborate his/her answer. Likewise, ten responses indicated the main points, while only two were able to corroborate their answer. Four responses indicated an illustration, with only one corroborating his/her answer. Four responses indicated an illustration, with only one corroborating his/her answer. Interestingly, though, six responses indicated personal notes taken as the reason for the recall, and five of those claims were corroborated (Figure 4.4).

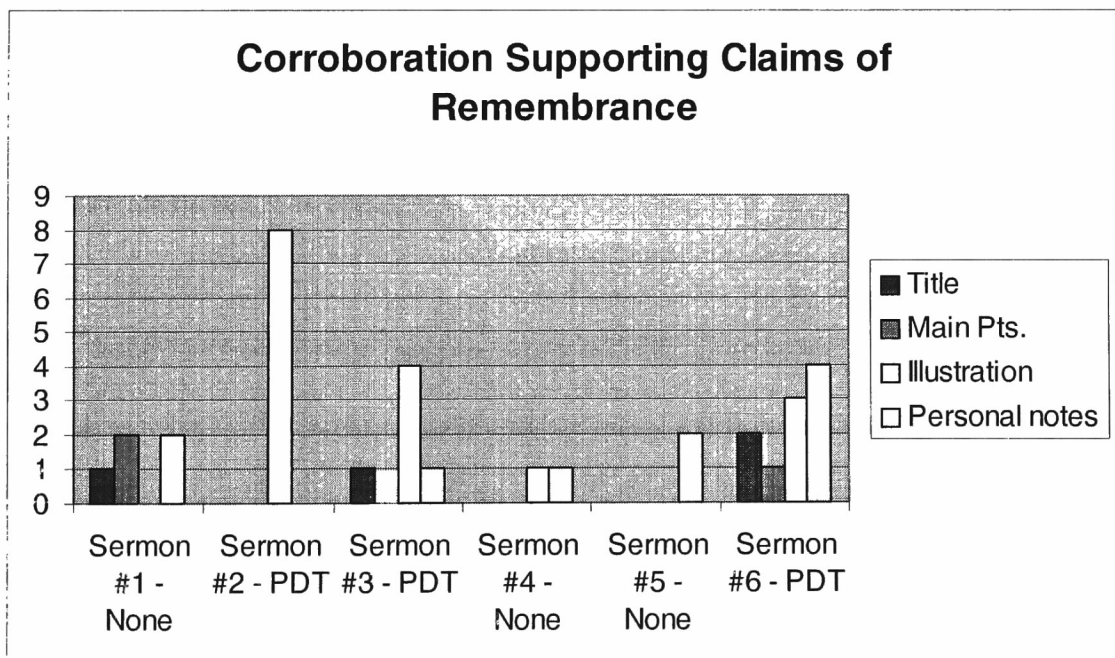


Figure 4.4

For the sermons with a PDT, seven responses claimed the title was the reason for their recall, yet only three gave corroborating evidence of their claim. Five responses indicated the main points of the sermon as the element responsible for their recall, but only one showed any sign of corroboration in the written answers. However, nineteen responses indicated an illustration as the element responsible, and fifteen of those were able to corroborate their claim (all of them referring to the PDT). Likewise, five responses indicated personal notes as the reason for their recall, and all five corroborated their claims in their answers to the last three questions on the questionnaire (Figure 4.4 page 62).

Here are some sample answers from the last three questions of some of the questionnaires that reveal corroboration of the respondents' claims.

From the third sermon (containing a PDT) in the study, "The Mighty Tongue," this respondent claimed the title was the element responsible for his recall. He wrote, in answer to question four, "The title alone completely explains. The tongue is so strong and can cut you, or hurt you just as painful as a knife." Another respondent, who indicated the illustration wrote, "He (the preacher) had us stick out our tongues at the person next to us."

From the first sermon (not containing a PDT), "The Power of Forgiveness," this respondent writes, after indicating the main points as the reason for recall, "We learned the king forgave a large debt, but the forgiven person wouldn't forgive a small one ... we have received the ultimate forgiveness, so anything else is small potatoes." Another person, who indicated personal notes, wrote, "I took notes ... it reminded me that in order

to be forgiven you must first forgive.” Still another person wrote, “The title was the first thing that clicked inside my head.”

And finally, from the second sermon (containing a PDT), here are some of the responses corroborating the respondents’ claims of recall. “It was about how we all carry stones, ‘harsh words,’ ‘mean thoughts.’ How words alone can hurt someone ... by his (the preacher’s) illustration with the stones, and how hard that words can hurt someone.” Another one wrote, “having everybody hold a stone through the whole sermon and ‘throw’ it down at the end ... everybody ‘throws’ stones and has them and needs to be aware of it and careful not to do so.” And again, “The use of the stones we were all given to hold to illustrate our sharp words ... Leaving that rock under my chair that morning gave me a definite starting point for a change of attitude and action.” A number of other corroborating comments were obtained but were not included in this paper in an effort to avoid redundancy.

The data revealed a direct relationship between the use of PDTs and a respondent’s indication of some impact of the sermon on their thinking and/or living. In sermons not employing a PDT only seven comments were offered indicating the impact of the sermon on respondents’ thinking and/or living. However, twenty-one respondents, in sermons with a PDT, offered statements, which indicated the impact of the sermon on their thinking and/or lifestyle.

Here is a sampling of some of the comments offered which indicate the impact of the sermon on respondents’ thinking or lives. One respondent, writing about the sermon with the stones (a PDT) said, “We are currently working in our house to curb the use of sharp words.” Another respondent to the same sermon wrote, “Words alone can hurt

someone. Now I try to walk each day with this thought.” And from the other sermon in this set, without a PDT, another person said, “It brought up issues I had put on the back burner. I prayer the following week for guidance. I needed some answers because the person I needed to forgive is difficult to talk to.” Still another response from that sermon indicated, “Remembering that we have received the ultimate forgiveness, so anything else is small potatoes.”

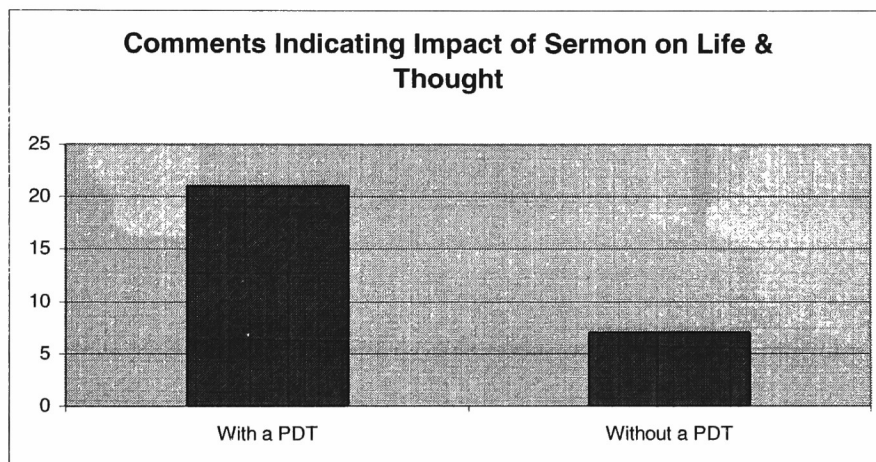


Figure 4.5

From the first sermon of the second set, “The Mighty Tongue” (with a PDT), one respondent said, “I realized I was wrong in a certain circumstance because my motives were selfish.” Another wrote, “I think more of what and how I say things so I don’t hurt the people I love.” And from the other sermon in the set, “Careful What You Say” (without a PDT), one respondent wrote, “I have tried to keep my opinions to myself.”

From the sermon on stress, containing a PDT, one person said, “I understand that circumstances are out of my hands, but not beyond God’s reach.” Still another wrote, “I keep my notes posted on my refrigerator and read it quite often. I’m going through a

difficult time right now and it's been very helpful." One more, "Dealing with everyday challenges and not letting them get the best of me."

Significant Findings

One of the significant findings (remember the definition of 'significant' from the beginning of this chapter) of this study was the obvious incongruity between the number of respondents who claimed sermon recall and those who could actually substantiate their claim with corroborating statements. While twenty-one of thirty-four responses, for sermons without a PDT, stated an ability to recall the sermon, and indicated an element of the sermon as the reason for the recall, only nine responses were able to corroborate the claim. On the other hand, while only thirty-two of forty-two responses, for sermons with a PDT, stated an ability to recall the sermon, and indicated an element responsible for the recall, twenty-four claims were corroborated by statements made on the questionnaires (Figure 4.6).

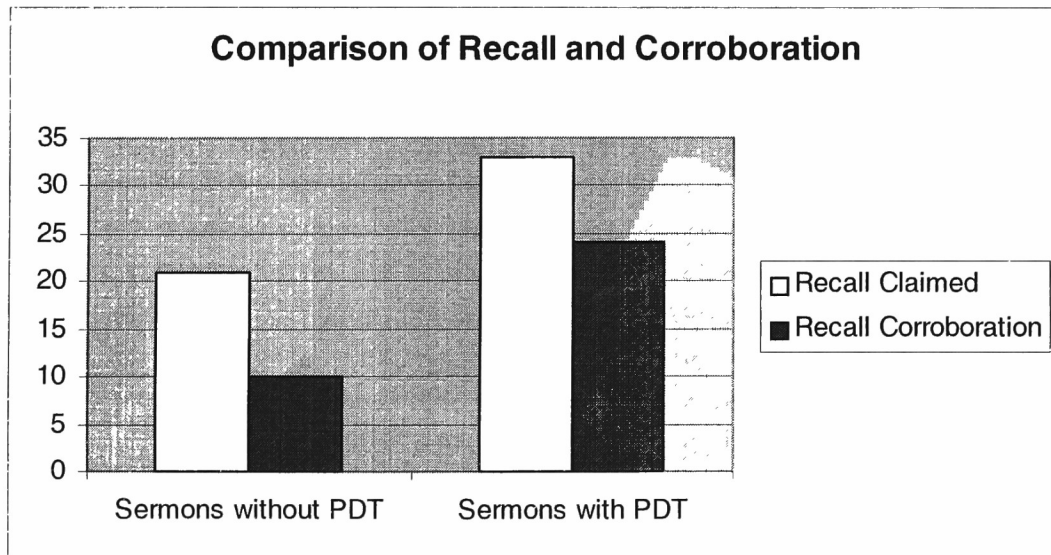


Figure 4.6

Additionally, the data reveals that of the four elements of the sermon listed on the questionnaires, one element significantly rose above the others as the most noted and corroborated reason for listener recall of the sermon. That element was the sermon illustration (Figure 4.6 page 66).

The study showed a balance between the four elements, pertaining to recall claims. However, the number of claims validated was significantly different. For all the sermons, with and without a PDT, seventeen responses indicated the title as the reason for recall. However, only four of those claims were corroborated. Likewise, fifteen responses indicated the title as the reason for recall, and yet only three of those claims were corroborated. Eleven responses indicated personal notes as the reason for recall. And ten of those were able to corroborate their claim. However sixteen, of the twenty-three indications of an illustration were corroborated by statements made (Figure 4.7).

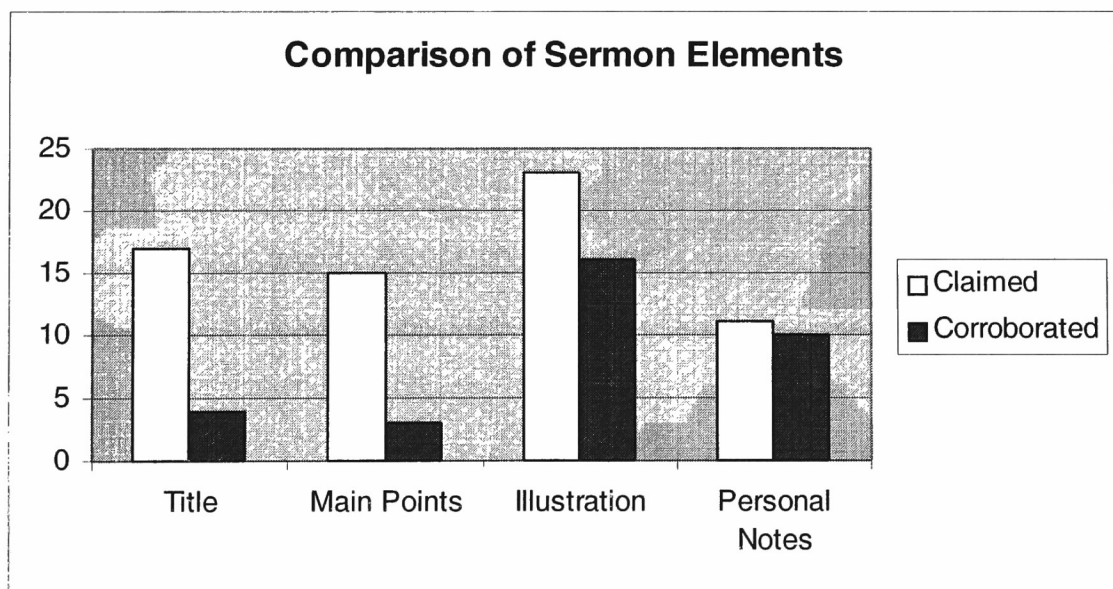


Figure 4.7

Two more significant findings are worth mentioning. First, there were claims of recollection for all the sermons involved in this study. However, the difference between

the claims and the validations, between sermons with and sermons without a PDT, is quite amazing (Figure 4.6 page 66). Only ten of the twenty-nine claims of recollection, for sermons without a PDT, could be corroborated. On the other hand, twenty-four of the thirty-six claims of recollection, for sermons with a PDT, could be corroborated.

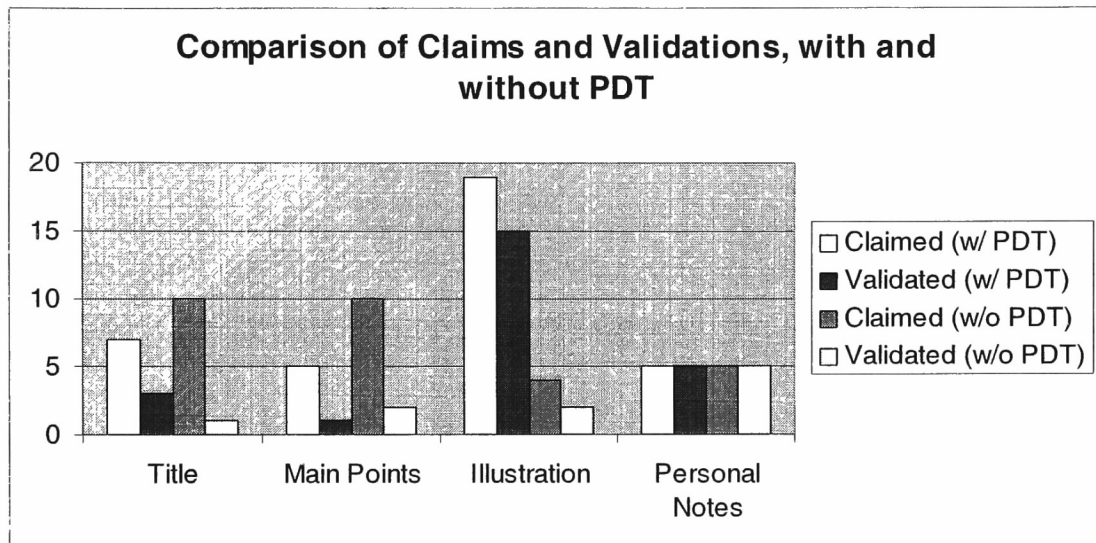


Figure 4.8

As the chart in Figure 4.8 clearly indicates, the variance between recall claims and corroboration of those claims, for all four elements listed, were smaller overall, for the sermons with a PDT, than for the sermons without a PDT.

And finally, it must be noted that the number of comments indicating the impact of the sermon on a respondent's life and/or thought was much higher for sermons containing a PDT than for those without a PDT (Figure 4.5 page 65). In the sermons using a PDT, twenty-one of thirty-three respondents, were able to articulate some kind of impact on their thinking or living. However, in sermons without a PDT, only seven of twenty-one commented on the impact of the sermon on their thinking or living.

The data from this study, while too limited in its size and scope to provide a conclusive, quantitative statement about the use of PDTs in sermons, does indicate that,

for this study and for these six sermons, the use of PDTs exhibits a positive impact on listener recall of the sermon, its theme and/or main points.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

This study began as an attempt to measure the effects of sermon-employed Participatory Drama Techniques (PDTs) on the listener's ability to remember the sermon. PDTs are really nothing new to the preaching profession. Pastors, evangelists, teachers, and even Jesus used them. However, research thus far indicates that, to date, no one has ever labeled or specifically studied PDTs and their affects on listeners to sermons.

Perhaps the greatest example of a PDT is Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper. When he broke the bread and passed the cup, announcing them to be his body and his blood, he invited the disciples to participate in the lesson he wanted them to learn. From that time on, the Church has habitually repeated this learning process employing the PDT. And subsequently, the meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper remains as potent today as it was in the Upper Room.

In this study, the affect of PDTs on the listener's ability to recall a sermon, its theme and/or its main points, was established for the six sermons studied. The author acknowledges that the scope and size of the study is too limited to make definitive, general statements about the effects of PDTs. However, for the subjects of this test, the effects were noticeable and noteworthy.

The study shows that, out of the six sermons preached, among the one hundred and ten respondents, fifty-three of seventy-six who were present, claimed to remember the sermon, its theme and/or its main points. Of those fifty-three, twenty-one were for sermons without a PDT (and only 10 could actually corroborate their claim), and thirty-two were for sermons with a PDT (of which twenty-four could corroborate their claim).

Given that this recall is six weeks after a sermon was presented, with at least five other sermons heard in the meantime, the evidence of PDTs' affect on sermon retention is noteworthy.

The data revealed that for sermons without a PDT, the elements of the sermon most credited with the listener's recall were the sermon title, and the sermon's main points. However, when given the opportunity to corroborate these claims, the subjects simply could not. While ten responses claimed to recall the sermon because of its title, only one could corroborate that claim. Likewise, though ten responses indicated the sermon's main points as the reason for recall, only two of the claims were corroborated. Four responses indicated personal notes as the reason for recall, yet five responses corroborated this as the reason for recall. This means that one person, who gave information in the essay questions corroborating personal notes as the reason for their recall, did not even claim that element as the reason.

On the other hand, for sermons containing a PDT, the study shows a significant (remember the term's definition from Chapter 4) difference. Seven responses indicated the sermon title as the reason for recall, only three such claims could be corroborated. Five responses indicated the sermon's main points, only one claim was corroborated. However, nineteen responses claimed an illustration as the reason for recall, and fifteen of those were not only corroborated but also specifically referred to the PDT when writing about the illustration in answer to question four, five or six on the questionnaire. It should also be noted that seven responses indicated personal notes as the reason for recall, five were corroborated.

The data certainly attests to the accuracy of this dissertation's thesis, in so far as it concerns the subjects of this study. For those who responded to the questionnaires, ample evidence was given that the use of a PDT in a sermon had a positive affect on the person's ability to remember the sermon, its theme and/or its main points. In fact the evidence indicates an overall improvement in the ability to corroborate respondent claims of recall for all four elements of the sermon (title, main points, illustration, and notes), at least for the subjects of this study (Figure 4.7 page 67). However, this study did not include any vehicle for measuring how much of an affect a PDT had on other reasons (elements of the sermon) indicated for sermon recall.

The Need for Further Investigation into PDTs

Certainly the results of this study indicate a further need to investigate this form of sermon illustration. In fact, this dissertation reveals the need for further study in the area of sermon retention, memory, and effective preaching tools (illustrations, narratives, object lessons, etc.). Those who preach the Word of God need to know how to assist listeners in placing the information or input from sermons into their long-term memory. The study also leads to a further step—the study of how sermon tools affect not only retention, but also understanding and application of sermon truths.

Remember that twenty-one of thirty-three respondents indicated the impact of the sermons with PDTs, while only seven of the twenty-one respondents to sermons without a PDT gave a similar indication. The number of these impact comments indicates significant influence by the sermons containing a PDT, presented to this group, on their ability to both recall the sermon, and how it had impacted their thinking and/or living. The number of responses was too small to make a comprehensive statement, but this

study indicates the need to further investigate the affects of PDTs on the thinking and living of listeners.

This study has shown that the use of a PDT in a sermon does assist the preacher in capturing the attention of the audience and engaging them in the process of discovering God's truth. The level of retention is enhanced when the listener becomes a participant in the message, for this allows them to attach significance and personal experience to the information which leads the creation of a long term memory.

The use of a PDT in a sermon provides the Holy Spirit with an additional avenue to speak personally and intimately to the individual. The result is self-discovery of truth. Perhaps it would be better stated as pastor-assisted and Spirit-led self-discovery of truth, which is always a more effective way of learning for adults.

In addition, this study reveals the need for further investigation into the affects of television and the image-based media on memory and recall in general. Much has been written about the relationship between television and violence, television and lethargy, television and education, but nothing substantial has been done in the area of television and memory. Long-term exposure to television and its effects on the viewer's ability to create memories or retain information is as valid a concern as the others are.

Limitations of the Study

One obvious limitation of the study is simply the size and scope of the subjects involved. This study involved only one local congregation and two preachers. Broadening the scope of the study to include a variety of preachers and congregations to see if the results are consistent across a wider range of subjects would prove valuable.

In addition, this study was limited to gathering information as it related only to the use and non-use of PDTs in sermons. The study did not investigate the impact of the use of PowerPoint (computer-generated images, scriptures, and notes) on listener retention. PowerPoint sermon notes were used with each of the six sermons.

The author sees a definite need to conduct a similar study, focusing primarily on the use and non-use of PowerPoint sermon notes in the sermon. In our television-dominated age, the use of video image certainly must have an effect on the comprehension and retention factors involved in sermon presentation and reception.

Recently a woman who used to attend Gateway Friends Church, a principal at a local elementary school, remarked to the author, that she missed the PowerPoint sermon notes. Because of her mother's health, she and her family recently began attending another church. Following her mother's stroke, both her parents expressed the need to return to church and asked them to attend a church closer to the parent's home with them. While presented with the Word of God at the other church, she noticed that without the PowerPoint notes and images before her on the screen, her mind tended to wander and she felt as though she was not retaining as much of the sermon.

This conversation lead the author to wonder what affects the use of PowerPoint sermon notes had on the overall retention of the sermon by the audience. Further study in this area is warranted. However, since PowerPoint notes were employed in all six of the study's sermons, any affect would be universal and would not skew the results of this study.

PDTs Used in the Study

In this study, three different PDTs were employed. The first one was used in the second sermon. The pastor asked each listener to hold a rather large stone in their hands while he preached from John 8:1-11 about the woman caught in adultery. These stones were compared to the words and actions people “throw” at each other every day. Throughout the sermon people were engaged in the story by the cold, hard, sharp edges of the stones in their hands (see Appendix B). The length of interaction with the stones made the impact of their use on the retention of the listener more significant (Figure 5.1).

In the third sermon of the study, based on James 3:1-10, the preacher asked the audience to stick out their tongues at each other so they could study them—how small they are, how unimpressive and unimportant a bodily feature they are. Then he shared about the power of that small, insignificant-looking part of the body (see Appendix C). The brevity of this PDT resulted in a lower percentage of people able corroborate their claim of recall based upon this PDT (Figure 5.1).

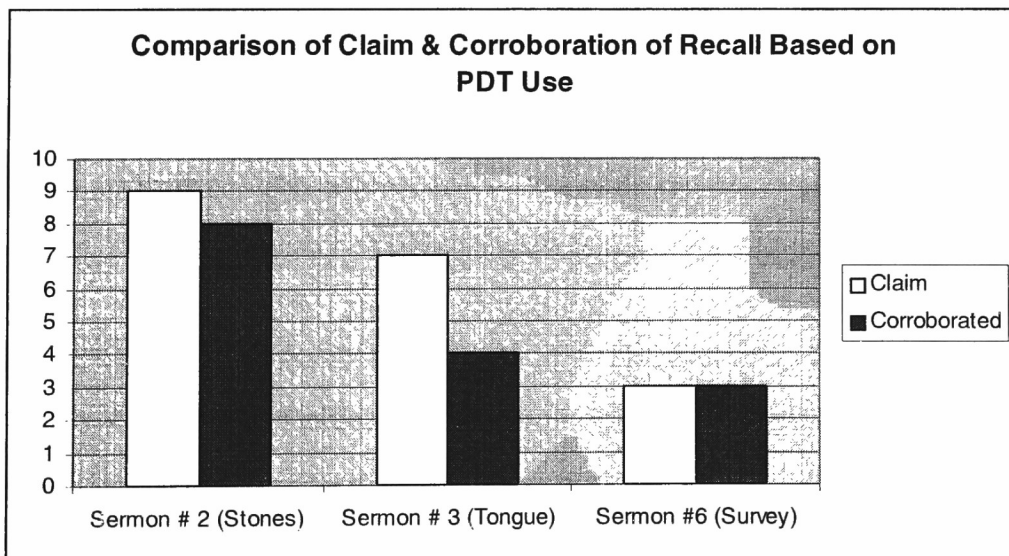


Figure 5.1

In the last sermon of this study, the pastor distributed a survey (see Appendix G) of seventeen statements, about life and stress, to each person in attendance, teens and older, before the service began. At the beginning of the sermon, the audience was instructed to respond, by circling a number, on a scale of 1 to 5, to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Then each one tallied his/her responses and the sum total indicated the level of stress he or she felt in his/her life at that time. The pastor then shared a sermon on five ways to overcome stress in life based upon various passages of Scripture. Once again the length of exposure or duration of the PDT resulted in a high percentage of corroboration for those claiming the PDT to be the reason for their recall (Figure 5.1 page 75).

The Use of PDTs in Sermons

In each case, where the PDT was employed in the sermon, the PDT engaged the audience in the sermon. People were asked to do something and by doing it became involved in the learning process. Moreover, the study reveals that the PDTs helped folks recall the sermon, its theme and/or main points. Does this mean that every sermon should employ a PDT? Certainly not, to do so would no doubt trivialize the illustration medium.

However, the results seem to indicate that every sermon should contain some form of illustration or application that can effectively draw the listener into participation with the biblical truth presented in the sermon. Craddock says, “listeners are active participants in preaching, whether vocal or silent in that participation ... Preaching is not simply a matter of speaking on Christian subjects; preaching is itself to be a Christian act” (25). Whether by a heart moving story, a visual aid, or a PDT, preachers are well advised

to prayerfully search for vehicles to engage their listeners in the sermon and consequently bring about greater change in their lives.

Preaching is not about entertainment. Preaching is about faithfully presenting the Word of God in such a way that the Spirit is able to transform those who hear it from listeners to participants, from hearers to doers of the Word. Employing techniques that allow for spontaneous discovery and inner insights on to how apply God's truth to one's life, should be the preacher's bread and butter-- his/her mainstay.

From this study, the author has learned the preacher cannot take the issue of sermon retention lightly. If people are not able to remember significant points or illustrations from a sermon, there is little likelihood the sermon will effect any change in the listener's life. For a sermon, or an element in that sermon, to become memorable, the preacher must look for creative ways to "tag" or "encode" that information in such a way that it becomes easily grasped or owned by the listener. The most effective way to accomplish this is by causing the listener to interact with the information, to sense it, to feel it, and/or to experience it.

PDTs do just that. They allow the listener, who has now become a participant in the sermon or illustration, to experience the lesson or truth being communicated. Just as it was necessary for the eternal Word of God to become incarnate, in order to more effectively communicate God's message to mankind, it will be necessary for the proclaimed Word of God to be incarnated for it to have its fullest effect. And while primarily the Holy Spirit's responsibility to accomplish this, methods and means that enhance the Spirit's opportunities to do so are available to those who preach.

The PDT can be such a weapon in the pastor's arsenal. Like any other sermon illustration, its employment requires the same care, prayer, and surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as any other form of illustration. The purpose of any illustration is not to titillate listeners, but to draw them into the sermon, to garner their participation with the truth of God's Word, and by that to afford the Spirit the opportunity to change and transform them.

Appendix A

Sermon #1

Presented on January 31, 1999

The Power in Forgiveness

[No PDT]

Matthew 18:21-35

Don Murray

INTRODUCTION: Annie's Story...

FORGIVENESS: Forgiveness is not something we do, it is a way of life.

- By His act of Grace, God has given us the power to totally and completely forgive others.
- We experience the power to forgive the moment that we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord – His forgiveness of our sins.
- This forgiveness received from Jesus is a total forgiveness of all of our sins and a cleansing of all our wrong-doings.

(1 John 1:9) But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.

In our text, Jesus told a story about a man who owed a king 50 million silver coins (Today that is worth at least \$290,850,000). To even begin to pay the debt, that man would have to sell his wife and children into slavery. But the King had compassion and freed him by forgiving the debt. Certainly the servant should have been filled with awe and compassion in light of such a great act of grace. But, the forgiven servant also has a debtor who owed him the equivalent of \$117 -- a tiny amount in contrast to the amount forgiven by the benevolent King. The servant becomes irate with his debtor and throws him into debtors prison. The King hears of his servant's behavior and is greatly disappointed. He turns the ungrateful servant over to the tormentors until his debt is paid.

The point of the story is that we cannot afford to not forgive our fellow man.

- If we don't forgive others, then God will not forgive us. WHY? Because our lack of forgiveness reveals that we have not received the forgiveness available to us in Jesus and therefore do not belong to Him.
- If we plan to not forgive those who have wronged us, we better make plans to never sin, for there will be no forgiveness for us from our Heavenly Father.
- But, when we do forgive, we loose our forgiven offender. We have freed him by our faith, for whatsoever we loose on earth is loosed in heaven. Heaven will begin to work on him and our prayer power will increase.

Jesus said...

(John 20:23) If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven. But if you don't forgive their sins, they will not be forgiven.

We can either exterminate people with our unforgiveness, or we can edify them with forgiveness. It's a decision we must make.

- Joseph made a decision to forgive. If he had not forgiven his brothers, he could have wiped out the whole Jewish nation by refusing them food. Instead he forgave them and edified them by giving them food.
- The Apostle Paul decided to forgive, also. He said that he would be accursed that his brethren might be saved. The Jews had him beaten many times and treated him cruelly; but instead of wanting to eradicate them, he chose to edify them.
- Jesus could have **exterminated** us because of our sins but, instead, His one desire was to **edify** us. Therefore, He forgave us.

Forgiveness is a lifestyle. If we adopt the lifestyle of Jesus, then we will accept His actions, towards those who offended him, as our own – forgiveness of those who offend us.

POWER IN FORGIVENESS:

Power to Heal: Forgiveness = path to wholeness rather than path to destruction

Power to Free: Forgiveness = way to liberty rather than bondage

Power to Live: Forgiveness = way to life rather than death – lifestyle of Jesus

CONCLUSION:

Forgiveness can only take place when we face the truth. Denial stands in the way of forgiveness. Sometimes we don't want to admit that people have hurt us or sinned against us. While appears to be a good intention, is really a deception. Sin affects both parties – the offender and the offende. Forgiveness is necessary for both to be set free from the penalty of sin.

Forgiveness is not letting the guilty party “off the hook.” Forgiveness does not mean I have to excuse what was done or what continues to happen, or let them back in my life again. Forgiveness is offered because it is God's way, not because the sin is undeserving of penalty. God has promised that in the end He will settle accounts. Forgiveness is, however, realizing I can't continue to blame others for my present behavior. I must own the responsibility for my choices and actions.

Forgiveness is letting go of any anger, hate, bitterness, or desire for revenge. By this I mean the hate, the rage, and all-consuming desire for revenge that eats away at me like a cancer, and will turn me into a bitter person. It's letting go of the anger that becomes counter-productive in our lives, ultimately taking its toll on our physical and mental health. As long as we hang on to the anger and need for revenge, others still have power over us. It is to our benefit to forgive and let it go.

Forgiveness is a healing process God has given us. When people sin against us, hurt us, mistreat us, we are injured spiritually, emotional and/or physically. These wounds cannot heal as long as there is “dirt” in the wound. Opening our wounds and allowing the Spirit to cleanse them through the forgiveness of God is an essential part of the healing process.

Christ doesn't take forgiveness lightly, and I don't believe he expects us to either. He gave his life that we might be forgiven. Our sin had to be atoned for. We can more easily forgive our brother when we realize what it took for us to receive God's forgiveness.

Our forgiveness toward others must not be taken lightly, either. What God did for us, we must do for others – that's living like Jesus. What Would Jesus Do?

If unforgiveness rules our hearts then we need to read again the parable of the servant who was forgiven but didn't forgive. He was forgiven what today would be millions of dollars. There was no way he could repay it in his lifetime. What did he do, he went to another servant who owed him a couple bucks and demanded payment. He had the man thrown in prison because he couldn't pay.

To look at this in terms of our lives, we must understand what God done for us. He forgave every single one of our sins, including the fact that his son had to suffer and die for our sins. What a slap in his face to turn around and refuse to forgive another one of his children after what he did for us.

Appendix B

Sermon #2

Presented on June 13, 1999

Only a Stone's Throw Away

[PDT have each one hold their stone throughout the sermon]

John 8:1-11

Don Murray

Review Kid's Sermon: Throwing Stones – Just a Boy's Game?

- Just boys doing what boys do...
- How easy it is to justify our behavior...
- How often do we participate in adult stone throwing? [expand]

* Throwing stones is always a dangerous game.

[read text]

Dissecting the Text:

Jesus had again come to the Temple to teach the truths of God.

- In the midst of his teaching, a group of well dressed men, enter the Temple and forced their way through the crowd to the front.
- With all the chaos of the moment, it was difficult to see what was going on.
- But when they reached the front, one can see them dragging a young woman.
- It's a pitiful sight. There she is, half-naked, clutching close to her body, what clothes she still has on.
- Her hair's a tangled mess.
- Crying softly trying to find a way to hide her shame, but stuck standing in the middle of the room – the focus of everyone's attention.

Amid the mounting tension one of the most brightly decorated of all the Pharisee's steps forward...

- As two of his assistants pull her to her feet, he announces, more than inquires, *"Teacher, this woman was just now caught in the very act of adultery, and in the law, Moses commanded such a woman to be stoned. What do you say?"*

The words appear to signal the others with him to pull stones from underneath their cloaks.

No one seems to stop long enough so that the woman is standing here all alone.

- Hers is a sin impossible to commit by oneself.
- Where is her accomplice? Caught in the act?
- Where's the man? Might he even be in the pharisaical entourage?

The woman begins to convulse. She knew the Law. She knew the verdict. She knew the sentence for her crime.

Jesus knows their hearts, all of them – the Pharisees, the religious hypocrites, the venomous crowd, even the sinful woman.

- He knows what the religious pretenders are up to – they want to catch Jesus in an action that violates the Law of Moses.
- But Jesus never flinches.
- He sees straight to the hypocrite's heart. And in that moment they are all exposed, just as they have exposed the woman.

And then Jesus does something no one expected.

- He stoops down, and begins to write on the ground with his finger.
- I mean never looking at the woman, never answering the Pharisee, he just bends down, and starts writing on the ground.

You can tell he is thinking. It seems to go on for an eternity.

And then he straightens up, and says loud enough for all to hear:

“If any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her!”

And then he stoops down again, to continue his drawing on the ground. Everything freezes:

- the woman on the ground.
- the Pharisee's holding their stones.
- the crowd of people struggling for a better view...

Jesus, just continues to drawing in the dirt.

Jesus' words begin to settle and take root in the hearts of those who are gathered...a strange thing begins to happen. Thunk, thunk, almost imperceptible at first, there comes this soft sound of stones falling to the ground.

- Knowing the Law, they realize that only the eyewitnesses can begin the stoning process.
- Knowing the Law, they know that anyone guilty of a sin worthy of stoning cannot, even if they are the eyewitness, begin the stoning process.

And for one day, at least, all over the Temple Courts, the playing field of life are leveled.
...and one by one, people began to file out of the Temple courts, until the only one who remains with Jesus is the woman.

Taking her by the hand, he lifts her up, and look into her eyes for the first time and inquires...

“Where is everyone? Isn’t there anyone left to accuse you?”

“No sir.” she answers.

“I am not going to accuse you either. You may go now, but don’t sin anymore.”

She knows she deserved punishment, she knows she is unworthy of forgiveness, in fact she never even asked for it...she just longed for someone to love her, love her enough to set her free from the bondage of her rebellious lifestyle.

She also now knows that God expects better of her, that it is possible to live life differently, to choose not to sin, rather than just give in to it.

Everything she needed in life, love and forgiveness, was simply a “stone’s throw away.”

Do we not have much in common with that humble woman?

- Our sin, our ugliness, our brokenness.
- Paul wrote, that *“All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.”*

But amazingly, the greatest thing we have in common with one another has nothing to do with us, and everything to do with Jesus.

- Our opportunity to be forgiven and made whole by what Jesus did on the cross
- Our acceptance by God based not on what we do, but on what Jesus has done

You see, God could stone each and everyone of us, but he chooses to give us grace instead.

- He chooses to pick us up out of the dirty places of our lives, out of the shameful parts of our story, and give us the gift of forgiveness, the gift of life.

God did not send his Son in to the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them! (John 3:17)

Each day we choose whether we will face the world armed with stones, or armed with the grace of God.

- Each day someone who has blown it will cross our path
- Each day somebody who’s living in sin, rebellion will come into our lives
- Each day we face the decision whether to throw stones or offering words of grace and forgiveness

What do you want to do? Throughout the service you have been holding a cold, hard stone – a reminder of what our words and deeds can be like when we face people without the grace and forgiveness of God.

As with the woman brought to Jesus, people are always just a “stone’s throw away” from God’s grace.

Appendix C

Sermon #3

Presented on May 2, 1999

The Mighty Tongue

[PDT – having each person stick their tongue out at someone so they can study it]

James 3:1-10 **Bryan Thiele**

In 1899 four reporters from Denver, Colorado, met by chance on a Saturday night in a Denver railroad station. Al Stevens, Jack Tournay, John Lewis, and Hal Wilshire worked for the four Denver papers: the Post, the Times, the Republican and the Rocky Mountain News.

Each had the unenviable task of finding a scoop for the Sunday edition. They had hoped to spot a visiting celebrity arriving that evening by train. However, none showed up, so the reports wondered what on earth they were going to do. As they discussed options in a nearby saloon, Al suggested they make up a story. The other three laughed -- at first. But before long they were all agreed -- they would come up with such a whopper that no one would question it and the senior editors would congratulate them on their find.

A phony local story would be too obvious, so they decided to write about someplace far away. They agreed on China. "What if we say that some American engineers, on their way to China, told us they were bidding on a major job: The Chinese government is planning on demolishing the Great Wall of China?"

Harold was not sure if the story would be believable. Why would the Chinese ever tear down the Great Wall? "As a sign of international goodwill, to invite foreign trade."

By 11:00 P.M. the four reporters had worked out the details, and all four Denver papers carried the story -- on the front page. The Times headline that Sunday read: "Great Chinese Wall Doomed! Peking seeks World Trade!"

Of course, the story was a ridiculous tall tale made up by four guys in a hotel bar. But amazingly enough their story was taken seriously and soon ran in newspapers in the Eastern U.S. and even abroad.

When the citizens of China heard that the Americans were sending a demolition crew to dismantle the Great Wall, most were indignant and some were even enraged.

Particularly angry were the members of a secret society made up of Chinese patriots. These guys were already against any kind of foreign intervention. So when they heard about the story, they went into action and attacked the foreign embassies in Peking and murdered hundreds of missionaries from abroad.

In the next 2 months twelve thousand troops from six countries, working together invaded China to protect their countrymen. The bloodshed of that time, born out of a journalistic hoax fabricated in a saloon in Denver, was the time of violence known ever since as the **Boxer Rebellion**.

What power the written or spoken word has! Nations have risen and fallen to the tongue. Lives have been elevated and lives have been cast down by human speech. The tiny tongue, what a mighty force indeed.

Our text today is in the book of James chapter 3 verses 3-12. James was the brother of Jesus and one of the things that he was best known for was his concern that faith in Christ be expressed in action; by what we say and do. Knowing this, we must ask ourselves, Can the human spirit be "seen?"

In the book *The King of the Earth*, Erich Sauer explains how this is possible: "A young man who devoted himself to ideological and moral problems... had been hoping to be further stimulated by meeting Socrates. But contact with this intellectual "giant" so overawed him that he scarcely dared to open his mouth to speak or to ask a question. So they walked side by side for a while without conversation. Then Socrates suddenly broke the silence and said kindly but briefly to his young companion, 'Speak, that I may "see" you.' In this short sentence lies the deep recognition of the connection between spirit and word. The tongue is the instrument for the manifestation of the human spirit."

James in his concern, gives us graphic analogies that help illustrate what potential the tongue has.

Let's read our text...

Let's take the horse illustration first. The horse is an incredibly powerful animal. Take 550 pounds (which would be as much as one of the strongest Olympic heavyweight lifters can pick up), set it on a horse's back, and it will barely snort as it stands there breathing easily under the burden. Take that same horse unburdened and it can sprint a quarter-mile in about 25 seconds. Magnificent animals. As Kent Hughes put it, "A horse is half a ton of raw power!" Yet place a bridle and bit in its mouth and watch a 100lb woman make the animal do what she wants.

Now let's look at James's second illustration, the ships. Let's, for the sake of argument, take the *Queen Mary*. The *Queen Mary* is an incredibly large ship. If you were to stand it up it would be taller than the Eiffel Tower by 40 feet. For those of you who have seen the movie *Titanic*, it's bigger. It has a whole other deck. Yet something that big is steered by something that is only 20% its size. And he who controls the rudder controls the ship.

Now I would like everyone to stick your tongue out at the person next to you. [PDT] Now be nice. This is only so you can get a good look at the size of the tongue in comparison to the whole body. Take a good look. It's pretty small isn't it? But it has such destructive power, such potential for harm. James describes it like this "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. What does he mean the tongue also is a fire? Can you imagine that? "Hi, How are you? Oh, sorry about your hair." What he means is the tongue has that scope of inflammatory power in human relationships. Those who misuse the tongue are guilty of spiritual arson. Sometimes all it takes is one word, or spark that produces a firestorm that annihilates everyone it touches.

Now having gotten our attention with this analogy, James adds the final touch: "and is itself set on fire by hell". Here James uses the same word for hell as his brother Jesus used—"Gehenna"—derived from the continuously burning garbage dump outside

Jerusalem. Another words the uncontrolled tongue has a direct pipeline to Hell. Uncontrolled, it has the power to do continuos damage.

Lets talk about some of the ways that we can allow our tongue to be uncontrolled. Or some ways that we give it power.

- 1) How about **Gossip**? Proverbs 18:8 puts it like this "The words of gossip are like choice morsels; they go down into a mans most inmost parts" Gossip is greedily picked up and stored away by the hearers like tasty tidbits. How many people have been victims of gossip? Having to look in the eyes of certain people, wondering if they heard the story or if they believed it. Here you go. Here are the top seven beginning words of gossip. 7) Have you heard...? 6) Did you know...? 5) They tell me... 4) Keep this to yourself, but 3) I don't believe it's true but I heard... 2) I wouldn't tell you, except that I know it will go no further...and of course 1) I'm only telling you so you can pray...
- 2) How about **Flattery**? Proverbs 29:5 says "Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet" and again in proverbs 26:28 says " A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruins" Now flattery is different then a compliment. Flattery is usual produced by a legion of unwholesome motivations.
- 3) How about **Criticism**? James 4:11 says, "Brothers do not slander one another" (Tell about the kid and slide story) One lady said to a man named Wesley "My talent is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "That's one talent God wouldn't care a bit if you buried!"
- 4) We can't forget **Lying**! Proverbs 12:19 reads "Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue only lasts a moment. John 8:44 states "He is the father of lies" (The Devil) Why would we want to do anything with him being the father?

These are just a few of the destructive powers of the tongue. Now let's take a look at what positive power a disciplined tongue has.

- 1) How about **Worship**? Hebrews 13:15 "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise. He is so worth it. He is our creator and loves to hear you sing to him. It also purifies our heart in the process
- 2) What about **Healing**? Luke 6:45 says "The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks." You have the Power to heal a broken heart, to heal life's wounds by speaking the word of God to others
- 3) And **Sanctification**? John 17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" Who can you sanctify that you haven't just because you haven't spoken the gospel to them. Which correlates with this next one.
- 4) And **Salvation**? Romans 10:14,15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" This is it. The Ultimate Power. You have the power to lead others to Christ. You have the power to proclaim Jesus Christ to those who don't know him. Or how about with yourself? Do you know you have the power to receive eternal life by your tongue? For Romans 10:9-10 proclaims "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will

be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Have you verbally confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord? This is the Ultimate Power. If you've never used this power God has given you, I encourage you to use it today, Claim that gift of salvation. Jesus loves you so much and he is just waiting for you to say it. So say it. Let's pray.

Appendix D

Sermon #4
Presented on July 11, 1999

Be Careful What You Say
[No PDT]

Ephesians 4:25-30

Don Murray

INTRODUCTION: Misspeaking...

[read text]

"I was recently on a tour of Latin America, and the only regret I have was that I didn't study Latin harder in school so I could converse with those people." -- Al Gore

"If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure." -- Al Gore

"I believe we are on an irreversible trend toward more freedom and democracy - but that could change." -- Vice President Al Gore, 5/22/98

"One word sums up probably the responsibility of any vice president, and that one word is 'to be prepared'." -- Vice President Al Gore, 12/6/93

"The future will be better tomorrow." -- Vice President Al Gore

"A low voter turnout is an indication of fewer people going to the polls." -- Vice President Al Gore

"It isn't pollution that's harming the environment. It's the impurities in our air and water that are doing it." -- Vice President Al Gore

"[It's] time for the human race to enter the solar system." -- Al Gore

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY:

Conventional wisdom is an intriguing concept. All of us are exposed to it. Usually it comes in the form of catchy sayings. You know, like... "Give him an inch . . . he'll take a mile." "Two wrongs . . . don't make a right." "If you lay down with the dogs . . . you'll get up with the fleas." "God helps those . . . that help themselves." "Cleanliness . . . is next to godliness." "Don't get mad . . . get even." "Don't get even . . . get ahead." "When in Rome . . . do as the Romans do." And finally, there is one I really like. "A dog may be able to whip a skunk . . . but the fight just ain't worth it." In other words, "Choose your battles wisely."

That's conventional wisdom. It may be conventional, but it may not always be wise. If we are going to be serious followers of Jesus, we need to remember that we are not called to live by conventional wisdom. We are

called to live in obedience to the Word of God. And we must learn to evaluate everything by the wisdom found in God's Word.

Take, for example, the saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans." On the surface, that sounds like a very reasonable statement. We're encouraged not to stand out too much. If you find yourself in the midst of sophisticated people, act sophisticated. Blend in. If you want to be successful, then don't swim against the current, go with the flow. And on it goes...

However, as Christians, we are called to a lifestyle that honors God. And sometimes that means standing out in a crowd. Often it means swimming upstream. For we are not called to live like the world. In the passages just before our text Paul emphasizes this fact. He exhorts us to "*stop living like stupid, godless people*" (v. 17). We are not to blend in with the world. Though we are in the world, we are not to do as the world does. Our lifestyle should honor God, not necessarily reflect the values of our age.

THE REASON FOR RIGHT LIVING:

In this chapter, we find the case for right living. Paul makes his case with a powerful mandate. He orders the Christians at Ephesus [and thus Christians of every generation] to reject the "stupid, godless" lifestyle of the world (4:17-19). He reminds us that such rebellious living leads to destruction and is contrary to the example of Jesus (4:20-24).

Right living demands that we copy Jesus, His lifestyle and healthy habits. Paul is calling for Christians to be conformed to Christ, instead of to the world. That means that we assume, when we choose to follow Jesus seriously, the personal responsibility to allow Him to live through us. To cooperate with His Spirit, who comes in His place and lives in the heart of all true believers, to cooperate with His Spirit in this effort.

This is a command. It is not a suggestion. Paul is saying that to be a serious follower of Jesus, a Christian means not going back to the way we used to live.

This is more than simply a command to quit acting in a certain way. This is a description of the nature of this present world and its belief system. See how he describes it... "*Their minds are in the dark, and they are stubborn and ignorant and have missed out on the life that comes from God.*" (v. 18).

Their thinking goes in the wrong direction. People who have yet to be enlightened by the Spirit of God are incapable of understanding the truth. They see evil as good and good as evil. Someone has said, "They can't see ahead (they live without vision and purpose). They can't see around or over (their troubles easily defeat them). They can't see through (they are easily deceived). They can't see in (they don't even really know themselves). They can't see up (even God is hidden from their blind eyes)." [Leroy Lawson]

The nature of the world is just that... *They no longer have any feelings about what is right, and they are so greedy that they do all kinds of indecent things.* (vv. 18-19). The world doesn't experience the life of God.

That's certainly one good reason not to go back and live like the world – the world doesn't experience God's life because of their self-inflicted ignorance. The term *ignorant* refers to a lack of knowledge. It also refers to a lack of experience.

The reason they lack this knowledge and experience is their stubbornness. The word comes from a medical sense to refer to stiff joints, as in arthritis. Because of a desire to go their own way, people develop a hardening of the heart. This is the condition of the world – stiff, callous. Refusing to follow God makes one insensitive to Him.

This insensitivity leads people to greediness and impurity. Is this not the lifestyle being promoted, glorified in our age? Every sin, once unthinkable, is now accepted and even advocated as normal behavior. Perversion masquerades as admissible behavior, and those who stand against it are labeled as narrow-minded hypocrites. Why? *“People no longer have feelings about what is right...”*

So, if we are serious about following Jesus, Paul calls us to reject the rebellion of living like the world. We are called to reject this lifestyle because *“that isn’t what you were taught about Jesus Christ”* (v. 20). Jesus’ teaching and example are the only reason we should need to reject the world’s lifestyle and choose the higher road.

Paul remind us that if we have accepted God’s gift of grace, then we have been enlightened. We received God’s Spirit and can now understand the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. We should allow the Spirit to guide us into a new way of thinking which will lead to a new way of living – like Jesus, truly holy.

The story is told of a little boy who went to the funeral of an atheist. There in the coffin was the man who professed not to believe in God, and, of course, God’s heaven. The little boy studied the well-dressed, lifeless figure for a few moments and said, “What a shame. All dressed up and no place to go.” Well, Christians are certainly not “all dressed up with no place to go.” There is a good reason why we have “put on the new self.” We are now to begin to live in a new way.

Therefore, we are instructed about the difference between how we used to live and how we are to live now in Christ.

Paul’s first instruction deals with truth. We are to abandon deceit and tell one another the truth. We have already seen that it must be motivated by love (4:15). We cannot afford the luxury of failing to be honest with one another. Paul reminds us that we are all part of the same body, same family – the family of God. To allow one member to continue on a course towards destruction affects us all.

When Christians try to deceive one another, they break the bonds of family, love, and fellowship. We belong together as members of one body, so we must be completely honest and open with one another. Remember the Kid’s Sermon?

- Chrysostom: “If the eye sees a serpent, does it deceive the foot? If the tongue tastes what is bitter, does it deceive the stomach?”
- Foulkes: “Lying is a great hindrance to the proper functioning of the body. When members are open and truthful, the body will work in harmony and therefore efficiently. Without openness and truth, there can only be disunity, disorder, and trouble.”

Next, Paul touches on anger and sin. Anger is a common human emotion. He does not deny that there are times when we will experience anger. But he says that we must not allow anger to control us. It is possible to be

angry and not sin. We keep from sinning by not allowing our anger to continue indefinitely. We must deal with our anger. We are not to let the sun go down on our anger. "Deal with your anger before the day is done." If we do not, we give the devil an opportunity to defeat us or to use us to destroy someone else.

Paul turns our attention to the issues of work, responsibility and benevolence (v. 28). There are many ways to steal. We can fail to give our employer a full day's work for a full day's pay. We can borrow something and never intend to remember to give it back. We can manipulate the system so that we get what we do not deserve. There are many forms of stealing. But we are not to be thieves. On the contrary, we are to work hard, not so we can become wealthy, but so that we can share with those who do not have.

Let us imitate the barber who one week noticed that there was a real increase in his business. When he tried to find out why, he discovered that his competitor, another barber in the village, was ill. When the week was ended, he took all that he had made above his average earnings and carried it to his competitor with his Christian love and sympathy.

Finally, Paul deals with our speech. He says we need to "Be Careful What We Say." We are to put off unwholesome talk (4:29). Christians are called to stop gossiping and slandering and cursing and to start controlling their speech for the sake of others. We are called to speak words that build up instead of tear down.

Alan Redpath explains, "I once formed a mutual encouragement fellowship at a time of stress in one of my pastorates. The members subscribed to a simple formula applied before speaking of any person or subject that was perhaps controversial.

T -- Is it True?

H -- Is it Helpful?

I -- Is it Inspiring?

N -- Is it Necessary?

K -- Is it Kind?

CONCLUSION:

What a contrast there would be if all those in the church truly carried out the admonition to "*live in a way that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own.*" (v. 1) The church would stand out like "a city that is set on a hill"! cf. **Mt 5:14-16** And the world, though it now is ignorant and stubborn, might be more likely to see the truth that is in Jesus.

Appendix E

Sermon #5

Presented on September 26, 1999

Dealing with Feelings

[No PDT]

Select Psalms, Proverbs & 2 Corinthians 4:7-9

Don Murray

INTRODUCTION: Emotions — they surface at the strangest times.

- In Gene Roddenberry's series, *Star Trek*, Vulcans, like the famous Dr. Spock, were a species who strove to overcome or eradicate their feelings, those "irrational emotions" that often got in the way of logical thinking.
- At the beginning "*Star Trek, The Motion Picture*," we find Spock on a desert planet trying to attain *Koliphar* – the Vulcan state of emotionless living. Spock, being half human and half Vulcan, just doesn't seem to be able to eradicate his human/emotional side.
- In the 70's and 80's we were being told that logic, education, reason were the Saviors of mankind. We can reason our way to world peace, we can educate ourselves out of crime, logic will keep us from destroying the world. **It hasn't happened. It can't.**
- Feelings, we all have the capacity to experience them. We all can be emotional. In fact there are times when our feelings take charge and often afterwards we are left with regret.
- We have feelings because God created us that way. He created us in His image.
- God has feelings. In *Deuteronomy 32:21*, God, speaking of His relationship to Israel says, "*You worshipped worthless idols, and made me jealous and angry!*"
- God has feelings. There are times when He is made angry and feels jealous. There are also times when He feels compassion and love. *Matthew 9:36* speaks of Jesus' love, "*When he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them. They were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*"
- God has feelings. He has emotions and so do we, because we were created in His image. We experience joy, excitement, compassion, love, anticipation, loneliness, fear, confusion, sadness, despair, anger, and even hatred. We can be both mad and glad. **We are emotional beings.**
- Or at least we should be. Sometimes pain or tragic events can cause us to turn off our emotions, to learn to ignore or deny our feelings.
- Sometimes we convince ourselves that we have attained *Koliphar*, Vulcan perfection – logic without emotion – "I'll live my life without feelings, so I don't get hurt anymore...."
- Sometimes our feelings are all out of whack. So perhaps the real question is: "How do we deal with our feelings?" Dealing with feeling is sometimes more difficult than we anticipate.

The Problem Of Feelings

Feelings & the Fallen Image:

- The reason, of course, that our feelings give us so much trouble is that they became distorted when mankind rebelled against God.
- The Bible teaches that the original human beings, Adam and Eve, chose to disobey God in the Garden of Eden. This rebellion is known as the Fall.
- By choosing to rebel against God, the parents of the human race fell from God's grace. It was at this time that sin entered the human race and corrupted it.
- The Bible teaches that all of creation was affected by the Fall. In mankind, the image of God was distorted.
- While God's feelings and emotions reflect His perfection, our feelings and emotions reflect our imperfection.
- Indeed, sin sometimes distorts our feelings to the point where they can become a problem. Dealing with feelings can be difficult.

Are there feelings you have that give you trouble?

- about another person.
- about a situation at work.
- about God.
- about yourself.

They could be feelings of...

➤ anger	➤ doubt
➤ resentment	➤ discouragement
➤ rejection	➤ confusion
➤ self-loathing	➤ un-forgiveness
➤ even hatred	

- How do you deal with those kind of feelings?
- Does the Bible have anything to say about this subject?
- Is there anything that we, as Christians, can do?

Yes there are several important things we can do.

Paul shows us, in our text, that even in the midst of even the most trying of times, though we feel totally distraught, we can control our feelings. **We don't have to be controlled by them!** In other words, even though he did not understand always what God was doing, he was able to hold his feelings in check and not be side-tracked by them. There are several important things we can learn from Paul and other biblical characters about dealing with feeling.

Acknowledge Your Feelings

The first thing we can learn is that feelings are feelings. This may sound strange. What I mean is that feelings are not necessarily reality. That does not mean that feelings are not real. They are indeed! But our feelings might not be an accurate reflection of how things really are. Therefore, we must recognize them for what they are and what they are not. We must also understand that how we feel is how we feel. We should not deny how we feel and simply try to suppress those feelings. How we feel is how we feel and those feelings will eventually surface. And when they surface they can surface in very

destructive ways. So don't deny your feelings. Now, this does not mean you have to tell everyone how you feel. That is certainly not wise. But you need to acknowledge those feelings and recognize that they are indeed yours.

Be Honest With God

The next thing we can do is be honest with God about our feelings. God certainly knows how we feel. And God can handle how we feel. Even when we are angry with God, He can handle it. Unlike us, God is not easily offended. He does not wear His feelings on His sleeve, so to speak. He loves us even when we are angry at Him. He loves us, even when we are misunderstanding His purpose for us. He loves us, even when we are confused and frustrated. So, we must not only acknowledge our feelings to ourselves, we must also acknowledge our feelings to God.

King David, a man after God's own heart, is a good example of someone who told God just how he felt. In the Psalms we see the full panorama of feelings expressed. There were certainly times when David was rejoicing in the Lord and expressed his praise. But there were also times when he was in despair and confusion. He exclaimed in *Psalms 42:5*: *Why am I discouraged? Why am I restless?* There were also times when he was feeling the crushing guilt of his own sin. In *Psalms 31:9-10* we read: *"Have pity, Lord! I am hurting and almost blind. My whole body aches. I have known only sorrow all my life long, and I suffer year after year. I am weak from sin, and my bones are limp."* There were also times when David was angry with his enemies and called God's wrath down upon them. Listen to what he says in *Psalms 35:26*: *"Disappoint and confuse all who are glad to see me in trouble, but disgrace and embarrass my proud enemies who say to me, 'You are nothing!'"* It should be obvious that David did not hesitate to tell God how he honestly felt.

Your feelings are how you feel and they are very real to you. Just as it sometimes helps to verbalize your feelings to others, it also helps to verbalize your feelings to God. In fact, that is an essential step in sorting out your feelings.

Struggle To Understand

Another thing we can do is to accept the fact that sometimes we must all struggle with our feelings. It is not a sin to struggle with your feelings. It is not a sin to be confused. It is not a sin to feel rejected. It is not a sin to be bound. And it is not a sin to struggle with how we feel. In fact, the sin may be in refusing to struggle with how we feel. The sin may be when we refuse to confront those feelings and to seek to do something about those feelings. You see, when we resign ourselves to feeling a certain way, we accept defeat. The reason why Paul could say that he was perplexed, but never giving up was that he refused to allow his feelings to turn him away from his hope in God. He might not understand what God was doing but he did know that God was doing something. And he refused to despair before he got the answers.

When we struggle with our feelings, if we remain open to God and do not despair, God will lead us through that struggle to an answer. Through the struggle He is doing something in our lives. We hate the struggle as much as the ground, if it had feelings, would hate the plow. Like the ground, however, there are times when our lives must be broken up to receive from God.

The key is to understand that God is ultimately in charge. Sometimes that is easier said than done, especially when we don't even believe that He is listening to us. But that is the foundation point. Knowing that God has a purpose that He is working out in my life helps me to make sense of the struggle. Paul saw that *we are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us.*" In other words, Paul was saying that if we let go and let God live in us, then God is at work. He is at work in our lives revealing His power, even in our weaknesses. When we don't understand all that God is doing, we can trust that He is still at work. It is not up to us to understand everything or even to have all the answers. We can trust God to do His work however we may feel.

Focus On The Facts

What do we do when we have acknowledged our feelings, been honest with God about them, and accepted the fact that we often need to struggle with our feelings in order to find the answers? There is still one important thing to do.

In order to deal with our feelings, we must focus on the facts concerning God, our relationship to Him, and His plan for our lives. You see, our feelings may not be the result of focusing on the facts. Our feelings may be the result of focusing on a lie. Our feelings may be the result of the deception of God's enemy. Our feelings may be the result of the weakness of our own flesh. Our feelings may be the result of focusing on external circumstances.

In order to deal with our feelings, we must focus on truth as it is revealed in Jesus. One of the enemy's greatest tools of deception is the half-truth. Something that has just enough truth in it to sound right, yet not be right.

An example of this difference can be found in the account of the spies that were sent into Canaan to gather information on that land. When the children of Israel crossed the wilderness they prepared to enter Canaan and conquer the land. God had told them that they would be successful. They selected twelve men to serve as a reconnaissance team to determine the lay of the land, where the important cities were, and determine their fortifications. When this team returned, the majority had been so overwhelmed by the apparent might of their enemies that they brought a negative report concerning the prospects of victory. Ten of the twelve said they should not attempt to defeat the inhabitants because their cities were large and fortified and their warriors were men of great size. In fact, they said that after they saw these large men that they *"felt as small as grasshoppers. (Num. 13:33)"* Only Caleb and Joshua were willing to take God at His word. They saw the giants and the fortified cities, not in comparison to themselves, but in comparison to their God. They encouraged the people to go in and take possession of the land.

Here is the difference between what is true and what is half-true. It was true that the cities were large and fortified. It was true that the inhabitants were men of great size. In fact, the description of the land was accurate. It was true. But it was not the whole truth. The truth was that Israel could conquer this mighty people. Why? because God had said they could. Their feelings were the result of their perception of the truth instead of their reliance on partial truth.

So we must focus on the truth about God — that He a loving God, a powerful God, a sovereign God, a God who is working out His plan in our lives if we let Him. We must

focus on the truth about ourselves — that we are important to God, that we matter to Him, that our feelings may not be reliable. As we focus on the truth found in His Word, we may find that our feelings begin to reflect a renewed faith in Him.

Jesus said, *"If you keep on obeying what I have said, you truly are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:31-32)

Appendix F

Sermon #6

Presented on October 24, 1999

Dealing with Stress

[PDT – Stress Worksheet each person filled out at beginning of sermon]

2 Corinthians 12:9

Don Murray

Introduction: How Stressed Are You? Worksheet [see attached]

Five Ways to Overcome Stress in Your Life:

1. Determine to Change – *Try your best to live quietly, to mind your own business, and to work hard, just as we taught you to do. (1 Thess. 4:11)*
 - Reducing stress requires a determination to change the way we live
 - What is “live quietly”? Literally = “refrain from labor” or “cease being nosy or gossipy” – mind your own business/life and set your own pace!
 - Jesus promised rest to those who follow Him. Rest of spirit, mind and body.
 - Stop chasing the world’s definitions and dreams!
 - Follow Jesus and find rest, not distress.
2. Learn to Say “No.” – [this is what Jesus did] *Mark 1:35-38*
 - Disciples had an agenda. Crowd had an agenda. Father had an agenda...Jesus knew Who He should listen to!
 - It’s not a sin to say “No” if you know that what God wants you to do.
 - When asked to extend yourself, ask time to pray first, seek godly council and then decide.
 - Avoid “impulse serving” or “guilt serving.”
3. Commit to Prayer – *Don’t worry about anything, but pray about everything....(Phil. 4:6)*
 - What a difference it makes when we take time to pray about life’s affairs/decisions.
 - **Worry is the evidence of a prayerless life!**
 - In prayer God will either change our situation or change our heart.
 - Question = “Who do you trust to make the decisions of your life?” God? Self?
4. Reconcile Quickly – *So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God. (Matt. 5:23-24)*
 - Open wounds, even small ones, keep us stressed even if the rest of life is balanced.
 - Keep short accounts!

- This is so important that God would rather we do this than offer our gifts to Him.
- 5. Practice Sabbath Living – *“People were not made for the good of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for the good of people.” (Mk. 2:27)*
 - 1/6 & 2-4/50-48 principles are for our good!
 - Recreational/personal busyness is NOT sabbath rest!
 - Rest = stopping and spending quality time with God.

Conclusion:

- Don't try to escape stress, embrace it.
- Admit how it makes you feel to God and seek His guidance/help.
- Receive His grace and surrender your stress to Him. He will help you handle it.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9)

1. Consider the causes of your stress
2. Make necessary changes
3. Surrender your life, stress and all, to God's control!

Trust and obey for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.

Appendix G

Sample Stress Worksheet

Used with Sermon #6

How Stressed Are You?

The questions below are designed to help you determine
more clearly what stresses affect you.

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 1. | I'm frequently late or missing appointments. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. | My emotions are near the surface (anger or tears come easily). | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. | I feel that my time's controlled by others. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. | I find myself engaging in mental arguments with my employer, family or others. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. | I feel like I'm always with people and am rarely alone. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. | I wonder when I'm going to get around to what I really want to do. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. | I feel tired emotionally, physically, or spiritually. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. | On my day off, I feel compelled to return to the office to finish work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. | If married: We seem to busy or tired for romance. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. | I think "grass is greener" thoughts about my career. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. | I find myself seeking escapes (food, sleep, TV, etc.). | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. | I seem to rush from one thing to the next and always feel busy. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. | I'm not sleeping well. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. | I'm overly concerned with finances. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. | I don't have time to maintain my most important relationships. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. | I'm always busy but wonder if I'm doing the right things. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. | I'm dealing with stressful external circumstances (impending marriage, birth of a baby, etc.). | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Scoring:

61-85: Running on empty!

36-60: Medium stress. Make some adjustments.

17-35: Low stress in general, but address any 4s or 5s.

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